Deconstructing Jan Kott's Contemporary Shakespeare: an Investigation of the Criticisms of Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore

Agnieszka Jadwiga Collier

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Contents

Dissertation Abstract

This Dissertation explores the phenomenon of Jan Kott, a prominent Polish literary and theatre critic, author of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964). I seek to challenge the argument proposed by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, who have compared Kott and E.M.W. Tillyard, a literary critic generally associated with traditional Shakespeare criticism. Dollimore and Sinfield described the critics as 'two sides of the same conservative coin', arguing that 'Kott does little more than invert the Elizabethan World Picture' – both approaches being predicated on the ideas of an essential human nature and the desirability of 'an order' hostile to positive political action'.[1]

The Dissertation is divided into two parts. While Part One sets up the social and cultural context, Part Two's concern is the close study of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in the context of Dollimore's and Sinfield's debate. Chapter One: 'Kott and Tillyard: Two Sides of the Same Conservative Coin?' outlines the main argument presented by Dollimore and Sinfield. Chapter Two: 'Kott's Formative Years: the Apostle or Victim of the Dominant Ideology' provides biographical note on Kott and some historical context in relation to politics and Polish cultural policy between 1949-1968, the time of Kott's intellectual formation, and then focuses on Kott's emergence as a critic and his development of a literary critique from Marxism, the avant-garde, socialist realism, and post-Marxism. Having established Kott's intellectual formation, in Chapter Three, 'Kott, Tillyard and the Royal Shakespeare Company: The Making of Ideology', I look at Kott's emerging ideas, in particular, those of 'contemporaneity' and Tillyard's concept of Elizabethan World Order in relation to the RSC and its apparently radical image. Having established the key arguments and theoretical context, Part Two: Chapter Four: ' ''The History of the world can do without psychology and without rhetoric. It is just action'': Kott's carnivalesque reading of *King Lear* ', provides a more analytical case study of *King Lear* in the context of Bakhtin's carnivalesque tradition and its subversive nature. The chapter tests out Dollimore and Sinfield's argument and views Kott's poetics as political and constructively oppositional. The Final Part will establish Conclusions.

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[1] Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore, 'History and Ideology: the Instance of Henry V' in John Drakakis, ed,. *Alternative Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 208.

Chapter One

Kott and Tillyard:
Two sides of the same conservative coin?

Introduction

On the 19 October 1986, Peter Brook presented a plaque on behalf of the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC) to Jan Kott, in recognition of his services to the field of theatre criticism. The conference was meant as 'a kind of birthday party', to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 'the most influential work on Shakespeare criticism of our time'.[1]

John Elsom argues that Kott's refreshing perspective 'abruptly changed' interpretations of Shakespeare.[2] By building analogues to the apocalyptic nightmares of modern times, war and holocaust, Kott challenged the image of traditional Anglo-American Shakespeare criticism in literature and performance.

Kott's interest in Shakespeare, however, was firstly expressed through numerous publications in various Polish journals, most notably, *Dialog*. In 1961, his articles were collected in a book *Szkice o Szekspirze* (Sketches on Shakespeare) which was later revised and published as *Szekspir Nasz Wspolczesny* (1964). The book was received well, particularly in theatre circles. Adam Bromberg, Kott's colleague from war time and director of the PWN publishing house, commissioned the English translation by Boleslaw Taborski and, in 1965, the English version under the title *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* was published by Methuen and was printed in Poland. Since then, the book has been translated into nineteen languages, securing Kott's position as a leading Shakespeare critic and scholar. In 1999, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow, published the third version, *Szekspir Nasz Wspolczesny II* (Shakespeare Our Contemporary II) which was enriched by some essays originally

published in American and British periodicals during Kott's period of emigration to the USA.

Kott divided *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* into two parts: tragedy (Part One) and comedy (Part Two). Part One starts with his account of the Grand Mechanism and History. For Kott, Shakespeare's histories constitute a historical epic, covering over a hundred years and divided into long chapters corresponding to the reigns. Instead of reading them chronologically, Kott looks at them in a synchronic perspective: ' if we read these chapters chronologically, following the sequence of reigns, we are struck by the thought that for Shakespeare history stands still'. [3] Kott develops his concept of the Grand Mechanism, according to which Shakespeare's Histories begin with a 'struggle for the throne, or for its consolidation'.[4] Kott particularly examines *Richard II* ('Kings') and *Hamlet* ('Hamlet of the Mid Century'). In Part One Kott also provides an inspiring reading of *King Lear* (' King Lear or Endgame'), in which he studies the play in the context of The Theatre of the Absurd. Part Two of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* is an exploration of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ('Titania and the Ass's Head'), in which he implicitly refers to the concept of the carnivalesque and the grotesque.

According to Kott, 'in Shakespeare's royal histories, there is only hate, lust and violence; the Grand Mechanism, which transforms the executor into a victim, and the victim into an executor'. In the comedies, 'Shakespeare creates some images of renaissance utopia...[where]...even the utopia of Arden forest and the hot dream of a midsummer night are split by inner contradictions. Harmony is only a brief and fleeting moment of stillness'. [5]

Elsom further argues that *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* 'opened the floodgates to political metaphor'[6], overtly annexing Shakespeare to the reality of post-war Europe. At the time of the Stalinist regime, when cultural practices were under severe censorship in Poland and other communist countries, Shakespearean debate and stage productions become a way of commenting on current political events. Throughout the 1960's plays like *Hamlet, Measure for Measure, Richard III, Macbeth,* and *King Lear* were used to explore the emergence of State repression and challenged Eastern European problems of constant fear under communist despotism. Furthermore, by referring to existentialism, the Theatre of the Absurd (banned in Poland for encouraging social pessimism), Leszek Kolakowski's Priest/Jester metaphor and Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque tradition, Kott challenged the Eastern European cultural policies of the time. As Martin Esslin points out in his introduction to *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*: 'the Theatre of the Absurd, [...] marks the emergence in contemporary art of a position beyond absolutes, beyond even the possibility of closed philosophical systems. It represents a position closely related to that of the post-Marxist thinkers of Eastern Europe [...] It is Kott's achievements that he saw this relationship' [7] - that is between the themes of Beckett or Ionesco and Shakespeare's subject matter.

Shakespeare's work constituted perfect material for commenting on aspects of the political in such a subtle way that the authorities could not ban the playwright. The meta-language was beyond the director's control but both audience and critic immediately recognised 'Uncle Joe's' moustache (resembling that of Stalin) on Jacek Woszczerowicz's Richard III, even though the authorities were powerless to stop it.

Kott's 'Hamlet of the Mid Century' and Andrzej Wajda's *Hamlet* produced in Cracow a few weeks after the XXth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, were political drama par excellence. The State authority was unable to bring pressure on the critics. As Adam Michnik, Polish journalist, writer and Solidarity activist, expelled from University of Warsaw in 1968 for protesting against dictatorship, claims in his essay on *Hamlet*, Kott 'wrote about how words and phrases had acquired a new meaning: ''Denmark's a prison''; ''the gallows are built stronger than the Church'' ' . He noted that the word most commonly heard on stage in *Hamlet* is 'watch'. The play opens with 'the watch' of fear and suspicion. Everybody is being watched in Hamlet and so also in the Stalinist 'empire'. Each person is 'simultaneously part of the Mechanism and its victim, because politics here leaves its imprint on every emotion and there is no escaping it...' When Hamlet pretends madness, he 'dons, in cold blood, the appearance of madness in order to carry out a *coup d'etat*. Hamlet is mad because politics, when it rejects all feelings, is itself madness'. Hamlet has a burning passion. He lives for action, not reflection. He is angry. He revels in his own indignation. But he has regained his capacity for action'. [8]

Kiernan Ryan argues that since the 1960's the British Royal Shakespeare Company's productions show the 'pervasive' and 'lingering' influence of Kott through a contemporary perspective deriving from existentialism, the Theatre of the Absurd and political oppression. [9] Inspired by Kott's ideas, Peter Brook said that 'Kott is undoubtedly the only writer on Elizabethan matters who assumes that everyone of his readers will at some point or other have been woken by the police in the middle of the night '. [10] Brook's *King Lear* (with Paul Scofield) at the RSC

(1964), refers to Kott's essay on 'King Lear or End Game'. In 2000, Kott recalls the meeting with Brook: 'everybody thought I was explaining Shakespeare through Beckett to draw attention to myself. I believe that Brook's interest was aroused by the connection, brought to light by me, between *Endgame* and *King Lear.* [...] I managed to convinced [Brook] of Kott's latest lunacy'. [11] In his account of Kott's impact on the British stage Dennis Kennedy maintains that 'Kott gave to the theatre of the 1960s and the 1970s a theoretically backed fortitude to admit that Shakespeare [...] can exhibit powerful and intellectually provocative visions of the present'.[12] In this light, Kott was considered a revolutionary and subversive critic. Additionally Kott's synchronic approach to the social, political and cultural realities of his times was generally regarded as a basis for the later materialist accounts of history and power which constituted a major interest for new historicists and cultural materialists in the 1980s. Kott's interpretation of *King Lear* offers a refreshing treatment of Kolakowski's Priest/Jester metaphor. It can also be argued that Kott's understanding of the 'grotesque' bears strong similarities to Bakhtin's 'grotesque realism' and 'the concept of degradation', which will be discussed in details in the subsequent chapters.

Yet Kott's apparently revolutionary ideas have led to various polemics and have also provoked dissent, which came to the fore in the 1980s. In 1985, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield presented the most striking criticism of Kott in their account of materialist ideology. In their view, Kott has neither been a radical or subversive critic or a precursor of new historicism. They concede that Kott has a certain 'basis for a materialist analysis of power and ideology, but then takes the argument towards an inevitable, all-encompassing inversion of cosmic order'.[13] For

Kott, 'in Shakespeare all human values are brittle, and the world is stronger than men. The implacable steam-roller of history crushes everybody and everything. Man is determined by his situation, by the step of the grand staircase on which he happens to find himself. It is that particular step that determines his freedom of choice'.[14] However, according to Dollimore and Sinfield, the Theatre of the Absurd with its rejection of existing order leaves no scope for intervention, subversion, negotiation or analysis of specific historical processes.

Most importantly, Dollimore and Sinfield compare Kott's approach to Shakespeare to that of E. M. W. Tillyard (1889-1962), a literary critic generally associated with traditional Shakespeare criticism. In his most widely read books on Shakespeare, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943), and *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944), Tillyard summarises the conclusions of scholarly criticism on the continuity of medieval and Elizabethan ideas and symbols. Tillyard was strongly convinced that Shakespeare was 'the voice of his own age first and through being that, the voice of humanity'.[15] Tillyard sets Shakespeare's history plays against this general background of intensely religious Elizabethan thought.

Born in Cambridge in 1889, the son of a former Mayor of the Borough, and educated at the Perse School and Jesus College, Tillyard lived almost his entire life in his hometown. He left Cambridge for Greece during the First World War, when he served as an infantry officer with the B.E.F (1915 –16) and later as a Liaison Officer with the Greek G.H.Q (1918-19). For this service Tillyard was recognised by an O.B.E, a Greek M.C. and was mentioned three times in dispatches. He began his academic career as a classical scholar and an archaeologist. Having received a degree

in classical studies, he was awarded the Craven Studentship. In 1911, he went to Athens where he undertook research at the British School of Archaeology. The research resulted in the publishing of his first book, *The Hope Vases* (1923). In his later years, Tillyard produced *Milton* (1930), which was a culmination of his Litt.D. degree. Tillyard followed his interest in classical studies in other publications on Milton, including *Milton's Correspondence and Academic Exercises* (1932), *The Milton Setting* (1938), *Studies in Milton* (1951) and the *Metaphysics and Milton* (1956). Tillyard's lifelong research interest in the epic in its classical and Miltonic forms found expression in the *English Epic and Its Background* (1954) and its sequel, *The Epic Strain in the English Novel* (1958). In 1958, Tillyard published his *Muse Unchanged*, in which he summarised his work at Cambridge University, particularly the establishing of the English department in the University. Tillyard, who from the mid 1940s till 1959 held a position as Master of Jesus College, Cambridge, was considered one of the Founding Fathers of the School and significantly influenced British scholarship and theatre productions in the post-war period till the 1980s.

Tillyard's four books on Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Last Plays* (1938), *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944), *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (1950) and most importantly, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943) gained him recognition as a Shakespeare scholar. In his *Elizabethan World Picture*, he examines the medieval idea of an ordered Chain of Being, which constituted a grand 'unified theory' or, in other words, a belief system. According to Tillyard, the Elizabethans believed in a hierarchical ordering of all existence from heavenly bodies to a hierarchical ordering on the earth, arranged in a system of 'correspondences'. To support his view,

Tillyard refers to the *Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful rebellion*, which illustrated, in Tillyard's own view, how the Elizabethan world order worked. He also traces the influence of the Homily in Shakespeare's plays, most explicitly, in *Troilus and Cressida,* concluding,

> If the Elizabethans believed in an ideal order animating earthly order, they were terrified lest it should be upset, and appalled by the visible tokens of disorder that suggested its upsetting. They were obsessed by the fear of chaos and the fact of mutability; and the obsession was powerful in proportion as their faith in the cosmic order was strong [...] To an Elizabethan it [chaos] meant the cosmic anarchy before creation and the wholesale dissolution that would result if the pressure of Providence relaxed and allowed the law of nature to cease functioning.[16]

In his afterword to *Political Shakespeare*, Raymond Williams recalls that *The Elizabethan World Picture* 'was recommended for our institution. At one level this was part of a reasonable attempt to get us to see Shakespeare's plays within the beliefs of his own time, as distinct from rash attempts to transfer the beliefs and actions to our own. But at another level it was a form of containment not only of our rashness, but also of those beliefs and actions themselves'. [17] Like Kott, Tillyard had a profound impact on the RSC, yet Ryan claims Tillyardian concepts 'cast Shakespeare as a deeply orthodox traditionalist rooted in his age'.[18]

According to Sinfield and Dollimore both Kott and Tillyard made the same fundamental error in their accounts of Shakespeare. This error from the materialist perspective is to falsely unify history and social process or the human subject in the name of the 'collective mind of people', a supposition that derives from the Western philosophical tradition. Dollimore and Sinfield argue that Tillyard's 'world picture' was not the 'occasional surfacing, the occasional articulation of the collective mind

but a strategy of ideological struggle'. [19] Hence Tillyard's world picture was 'an ideological legitimisation of the existing social order, one rendered the more necessary by the apparent instability, actual and imagined of that order'.[20] Tillyard ignores the fact that the *Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion* was designed, as Dollimore and Sinfield claim, 'to preserve an oppressive regime'. Therefore, sermons like the one suggested by Tillyard were not simply the ''occasion for the 'collective mind' to celebrate its most cherished beliefs but an attempt to tell sectors of an untruly populace what to think 'in order' to keep them in their place''.[21]

Unlike Tillyard, Kott's criticism seeks to oppose the idea that 'Shakespeare believed in and expresses a political hierarchy whose rightness is guaranteed by its reflection of a divine hierarchy'; yet in the view of Dollimore and Sinfield Kott's work is 'trapped nevertheless in a problematic of order, one which stems from a long tradition of idealist philosophy'.[22] From this perspective Dollimore and Sinfield argue that Kott's *SOC* shows an anguish at the failure of the idea of order. Kott interprets Tudor Myth as a political device, and seeks to question the providential view, that of the legitimacy, and the personal nature of the divinely appointed. In doing so, he apparently undermines the Tillyardian view of History, according to which the historical process underwent certain cycles and was perceived in terms of sin and punishment; each unsuccessful and unquiet reign was a consequence of provoking and inflicting God's scourge. Yet, for Dollimore and Sinfield Kott and Tillyard are 'two sides of the same conservative coin' and 'Kott does little more than invert the Elizabethan World Picture: the terms of the debate are not changed'.[23] Instead, Dollimore and Sinfield refer to Derrida, claiming that 'a metaphysic of order is not radically undermined by invoking disorder; the two terms are necessary to each

other, within the one problematic. Order is predicated on the undesirability of disorder, and vice versa'. [24]

According to Dollimore and Sinfield, the supposition that both Kott and Tillyard are conservative in their approach to Shakespeare is based on two kinds of theoretical emphasis. They focus on a particular view of the complex way in which a dominant ideology can work, where 'history and the human subject can be understood in terms of social and political process'. [25] They argue that Kott is a prime example of this complex way in which ideology can work. While he is generally considered as being radical and subversive, in fact he is supporting the *status quo*. Firstly, Kott is viewed as a conservative by Dollimore and Sinfield, because he has a reactionary or impoverished view of 'the essential', unchangeable human nature. Secondly, he cannot see any other terms of debate but the basic binary opposition of order/disorder, the attitude which finally leads to hostility to positive political action as embodied in the alienation of Absurdist Theatre.

In his *Radical Tragedy*, Dollimore offers his understanding of the term 'radical'. He claims 'we need to recognise then how a writer can be intellectually radical without necessarily being politically so. In the individual writer or text subversive thought and political conservatism may seem to be harmonised in a way which belies the fact that historically the two things relate dialectically: the former relates to the latter in ways which are initially integral to it yet eventually contradict it'.[26] Dollimore's understanding of the term 'radical' derives from Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* which defines it as 'marked by a considerable departure from the usual or traditional', and also from an explanation provided by the

Bibliographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the seventeenth century, that 'in the proper etymological sense of the term...[we] define radicals as those who sought fundamental change by striking at the very root of contemporary assumptions and institutions.' [27]

Dollimore and Sinfield provide a brief account of certain trends in post–war traditional criticism that interpreted Shakespeare from two different perspectives. One trend seeks to approach Shakespeare through Tudor Myth, and with it, all human aspiration, including those of political nature. Yet Shakespeare's plays are 'made to speak an Absurdist or nihilist idea of the ''human condition'', a precise reversal of the divinely quarantined harmony proclaimed by Tillyard'. [28] This trend undermines the Tudors, representing the futility of politics, and at the same time undermining individual integrity.

The Desirability of Order

The main tradition in Anglo-American literary criticism has been preoccupied with an issue which Raymond Williams has defined as 'a problem of order' in Shakespeare drama. This stems from a social and cultural crisis 'in which the limits of current religion and science, but also the probable disintegration of an inherited social and cultural order were being sharply experienced'. [29] The ideology of the Elizabethan World Picture was built around the cultural tenet of teleological design: the divine plan informed the universe generally and socially, characterised by order and degree. Identity and purpose were inextricably related, with both deriving from the person's place or design. Kott suggested another interpretation, which apparently was regarded as revolutionary, but which for Dollimore and Sinfield seemed a

perfect illustration of Derrida's discourse of 'binary opposition'.

Let us consider the question of order as presented by Tillyard and Kott. According to Tillyard, Shakespeare's access to the doctrine came primarily from the Book of Genesis, Plato's work and the Homily, particularly 'The Sermon of Obedience: or an Exhortation Concerning Good Order and Obedience To Rules and Magistrates' (1547).[30] The universe according to this teleological theory is a unity in which everything has its own place and is a perfect creation of God. The theologians in the Tudor period used the concept of cosmic order to establish an association between the imperfection of human existence and the perfect harmony of God's universe, the order of the heavenly hierarchy having its mirror reflection on Earth. The sovereign corresponds to the sun; any disorder on Earth brings about some disorder in heaven. This idea can be illustrated in *Henry VI* when the Duke of Bedford says at the funeral procession of the King:

> Hung be the heavens with black! Yield, day, to night!
> Comets, importing change of times and states,
> Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky,
> And with them scourge the bad revolting stars
> That has consented unto Henry's death.
> (Henry VI. I. I. 1-5)

In the medieval period this concept was used to assert the interdependence between all authorities and privileges. The idea encouraged every member of a feudal society to accept his or her duties and place in society. [31] Dollimore and Sinfield accuse Tillyard of a lack of adequate critical skill in endorsing the idea that the 'projection

of an alleged human order into alleged divine order affords [...] a mystifying confirmation of the *status quo'*. [32] Hence, in his analysis of the Homily, Tillyard admires the 'dramatic touch' of 'a splendid picture of original obedience and order in the Garden Eden' [33], showing that Shakespeare was 'the voice of his own age first and only through being the voice of humanity'.[34] He finds a Shakespeare who is fundamentally confident about a hierarchical view of the universe and its reflected political order. Dollimore and Sinfield find this supposition a predominantly authoritarian and false approach to Shakespeare.

Kott is severely criticised by Dollimore and Sinfield for reverting to Tillyard's world picture rather than pursuing the materialist approach. In the place of a perfect harmony in Kott's account we are confronted with the Grand Mechanism. For Kott 'the order of history and the order of nature are both cruel; terrifying are the passions that breed in the human heart'.[35] The theoretical assumptions on which Dollimore and Sinfield base their argument come from Derrida's concept of difference. Derrida insists, according to Dollimore and Sinfield, that invoking disorder does not radically undermine a metaphysic of order: rather, the two terms are necessary to each other within the one problematic. Order is predicated on the undesirability of discords and vice versa. Further, Kott's inversion of Tillyard's Elizabethan World Picture is, according to Dollimore and Sinfield, a perfect example of Derrida's concept of binary oppositions, i.e. the absence of God affirms the desirability of God. Dollimore claims that 'although chaos is the opposite of order and therefore the opposite of traditional metaphysical mainstays of order (the Platonic Form for example, or Christian providentialism) it nevertheless often gets constructed [...] as a kind of inverted metaphysical category; its very ubiquity is

made to imply a transhistorical irreducible state of disorder, essentially the same behind its different manifestations and to be explained *a priori* – in terms of human nature, say, or the events of pre-history.' [36] According to Dollimore and Sinfield, both Kott and Tillyard can only provide a discourse in terms of binary oppositions of order/disorder.

Indeed the juxtaposition between Tillyard's and Kott's structural and interpretative patterns does reveal certain similarities. In Tillyard's accounts of history (and those of Campbell to whom Tillyard is much indebted) the War of the Roses shows a recurring pattern of English history which can be described in the following way: usurper seizes the throne, God avenges this upon the third heir through the agency of another usurper, whose sin is again avenged upon the third heir. [37] In Kott's supposition the names of the Kings may change but 'it is always a Henry who pushed a Richard down or the other way around' and:

> ...when we read these chapters chronologically, following the sequence of reigns, we are struck by the thought that for Shakespeare history stands still. [...]. Each of these great historical tragedies begins with a struggle for the throne, or for its consolidation. Each ends with the monarch's death and a new coronation. In each of the Histories the legitimate ruler drags behind him a long chain of crimes. He has rejected the feudal lords who helped him to reach for the crown; he murders, first his enemies, then his former allies; he executes possible successors and pretenders to the crown. [...] The wheel has turned full circle.[38]

Another issue is the very interpretation of the history plays with regard to cyclical pattern. For Tillyard, Shakespeare's history plays maintain a perfectly cyclic pattern derived from Hall, according to which an unsuccessful reign is followed by a prosperous and quiet time.[39]

I. The unquiet time of King Henry IV

II. The victorious acts of Henry V

III. The troublesome season of Henry VI

IV. The prosperous reign of Edward IV

V. The pitiful life of Edward V

VI. The tragic doings of Richard III

VII. The political governance of Henry VII

VIII. The triumphant reign of Henry VIII

Moreover, great national heroes like Henry V or Henry VII were to act, in the minds of Elizabethan (and according to Tillyard in the mind of Shakespeare) as God's agents, who were to restore the country and bring peace and prosperity to their subjects. Apart from the two isolated plays, *King John* and *Henry VIII*, the two tetralogies constitute a unity with a coherent picture of a providential view of history. In contrast to this, Kott analyses only selected histories, in particular, *Richard II* and *Richard III,* in which his primary focus centres around the question of power. Kott's kings are not God's anointed and Shakespeare's histories are *dramatis personae* of the Grand Mechanism. Further, the history of Renaissance is just a grand staircase from the top of which new kings are ever falling into the abyss. Therefore, to Kott the history can be reduced to the concept of the Grand Mechanism and to the notion of the executioner and his victim. Kott maintains that Shakespeare's histories are based on the concept of the Grand Mechanism, a mechanism of history in which Shakespearean characters have different names but all participate in the same universal tragedy - a human being struggling to achieve the highest social position.

Kott believes that Shakespeare's realism lies in the fact that the playwright was fully aware of the extent to which people are involved in history:

> Some make history and fall victims to it. Others only think they make it, but they, too, fall victims to it. The former are kings; the latter – the kings' confidants who execute their orders and are cogs in the Grand Mechanism. There is also a third category of people: the common citizens of the Kingdom. Grand historical events are performed on the fields of battle, in the royal palace, and the Tower prison. But the Tower, the royal palace, and the battlefields are actually situated in England.[40]

Hence, history is made only by rulers and opponents who have been placed at the top of the stairs of History, Power and Politics.

Hostility to Political Action

According to Alan Bloom, John of Gaunt in *Richard II*, Act I ii 37-41 supports the principle of order and strongly objects to any rebellion against Kings, who are 'God's substitute' and 'minister' on the Earth. Gaunt is deeply convinced that leaving the 'quarrel to the will of heaven' will consequently lead to divine 'vengeance on offender's heads'. (Act I ii 6-8). Thus, any disregard for loyalty to the sovereign must bring about God's scourge. In his study of *Richard II*, Bloom points out that the aim of the first acts of the play is to present the King as an unsuccessful ruler who should be deposed and lose the crown (Act II ii 239-245, 258).[41] The King is depicted as a murderer and thief who rashly wastes money and is deficient as a King compared to his ancestors. In this light, Bolingbroke's attempts to depose the king from his office might be well seen as desirable and rightful. Yet, even without his power and the loyalty of his subjects Richard is still God's anointed: 'Fear not my Lord, That power that made you King/ Hath power to keep you King in spite of all'. (Act III ii 27-28). The Bishop of Carlisle also warns Bolingbroke that: 'Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny shall here inhabit and this land be called the field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls. O if you rear this house against this house it will the woefullest division prove that ever fell upon this cursed earth.' (Act IV I 133-138) The rebellion against the divine law so clearly expressed in the Bishop's prophecy would result in the future 'unquiet times of Henry IV' which were dominated by the wars of the Roses between the House of York and the House of Lancaster.

Tillyard's account of rebellion bears strong similarities to that of Bloom. He primarily refers to the *Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion* (1569) which, in his opinion, would have been commonly known in Elizabethan times. In

addition, he seems to affirm Davies' sentiments, that 'it is better to obey a bad king than to run civil war and that a state ought to be an entire monarchy'.[42] Tillyard adds 'only a minority saw recent history as a clear and connected pattern, but the orthodox doctrines of rebellion and of the monarchy were shared by every section of the community'.[43] The importance for Tillyard is the conviction that the 'Tudor age was intensely religious. [...] it was this religious respect for their rules that caused the English to accept and even to approve the drastic curtailments of their old liberties made definitive by Henry VIII' and his predecessors.[44]

For Dollimore and Sinfield, Kott's hostility to active political action is reflected in his existentialist approach. In his close study of *Richard II*, Kott comes to the conclusion that the play tackles the problem of fear of the world and its cruel mechanism, from which there is no escape. The protagonist is left with no choice since 'there is only the King's situation, and the system'. Dollimore and Sinfield suggest that Kott's interpretation results in political defeatism reflected in the alienation scenarios of Absurdist Theatre. In his essay 'King Lear or Endgame' Kott interprets the play in the context of Beckettian ideas, concluding that a human being is doomed to his/her destiny which is senseless suffering and death. Like Beckett, Kott believes that human life is determined and sphinx-like. The circus and the theatre have become pertinent metaphors for life both reflecting (external) reality where people struggle pointlessly with their own problems. In this Beckettian vision, Kott compares Gloucester's clownish leap from the cliffs of Dover in *Lear*, to that of Didi and Gogo's clownish attempt to hang themselves in *Waiting for Godot:*

> Gloucester did fall, and he got up again. He made his suicide attempt, but he failed to shake the world. Nothing has changed. [...] If there are no gods, suicide made no sense. Death exists in any case. Suicide cannot alter human fate, but only accelerates it. It ceases to be protest. It is surrender. It becomes the acceptance of the world's greatest cruelty – death.[45]

Inspired by Sartre and Camus, this interpretation also reflects a view of liberal western democracies that ' privileges the anguish of the individual over the destiny of the social group'.[46] For Shakespeare (and Kott), the world has been a cruel place. Additionally, following Kolakowski and other post-Stalinist intellectuals Kott rejects all absolutes in the realm of thought:

> We declare ourselves in favour of the philosophy of the jester, that is, for an attitude of negative vigilance in the face of the absolute... It is the option for a vision of the world that provides prospects for a slow and difficult realignment of the elements in our human action that are most difficult to align: goodness without universal toleration, courage without fanaticism, intelligence without apathy, and hope without blindness. All other fruits of philosophy are of little importance.[47]

Further, Dollimore and Sinfield point out that materialist criticism seeks to recover the voices and cultures of the repressed and marginalised. [48] For example, *Henry V*, in the context of Tillyardian (and Kottian) criticism encourages an idea that foreign war led to establishing national unity. In Shakespeare's histories, as interpreted by Tillyard, 'unsuccessful war abroad and civil war at home are the large theme; victory abroad and harmony at home are the exceptions, and the fear of disorder is never absent [...] Behind disorder is some sort of order, or ''degree'' on earth, and that order has its counterpart in heaven.'[49] *Henry V* is, thus, the 'copybook paragon of kingly virtue, to balance Richard's monstrous pattern of concentrated vice.'[50]. In the

view of Dollimore and Sinfield, the foreign war, depicted in *Henry V*, was the 'site of competing interests, material and ideological, and the assumption that the nation must unite against a common foe was shot through with conflict and contradiction.' [51] Their interpretation of *Henry V* illustrates how power works 'by being seen to contain whatever threatens it, and the principal strategy of ideology is to legitimate inequality and exploitation by representing the social order which perpetuates these things as immutable and unalterable'. [52] Dollimore and Sinfield suggest that under Elizabethan law institutions like theatre worked to achieve a unity. Theatre was under state control, being often summoned to perform at court and by doing so, was a direct extension of royal power. Alternatively, it was a cultural product in which market forces were the strongest and in being so it was particularly susceptible to the impact of subordinate and emergent classes.

In their evaluation of Kott's contribution, both Dollimore and Sinfield agree that Kott 'chimed in with attention to modern and existentialist writing which offer as profound studies of the human condition a critique of progressive ideas and an invocation of ''spiritual alienation''. [53] Dollimore and Sinfield suppose that Kott's Theatre of the Absurd takes its whole structure from the absence of God, and therefore 'cannot but affirm the importance of desirability of God'.

Ideology and The Human Subject

Accordingly, Dollimore and Sinfield formulate their crucial criticism of Kott and Tillyard and state that 'the most fundamental error in these accounts of the role of ideology is falsely to unify history and/or the individual human subject'. [54] In one

account history is unified by a teleological principle conferring meaningful order (Tillyard) and in the other, by the inversion of this with the 'implacable roller' (Kott). [55] These two characteristic humanist approaches, they claim, are not only inconsequential but also fundamentally erroneous.

Theories of the ultimate unity of both history and the human subject, which originate from a western philosophical tradition, have usually implied each other: 'the universal being seen as manifested through individual essences, which in turn presuppose universals'. [56] Dollimore and Sinfield provide their own alternative: instead of 'universal chaos' and 'subjective fragmentation' they encourage a materialist account of ideology that 'is not just a set of ideas, it's material practice, woven into the fabric of everyday life'. [57] At the same time, the ' dominant ideology is realised specifically through the institutions of education, the family, the law, religion, journalism, and culture.' [58] Dollimore and Sinfield's accounts of ideology bear strong similarities to Louis Althusser's concept of ideology. Althusser claimed that ideology has a material existence: 'the system of beliefs which constitutes ideology is brought into cultural practices and social institutions'.[59] Althusser also sees ideology as powerfully imprinted in consciousness leading to misrecognition.

Dollimore and Sinfield refer to Althusser's concept of ideology which has been significant in the development of modern theories of the decentred human subject. For Althusser humanism can be described by two complementary and indissociable postulates:

i) That there is an universal essence of man

ii) That this essence is the attribute of 'each single individual who is its real subject'. [60]

He goes on to argue that humanism gives a concept of 'man' which must be abolished: 'It is impossible to know anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes'. [61] Against Humanism Althusser contends that 'the human subject is decentred, constituted by a structure which has no centre either except in the imaginary misrecognition of the ''ego'', in other words, in the ideological formations where it finds recognition'.[62] Dollimore is also influenced by Derrida who writes of the importance of going beyond essentialist humanism, 'Man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of onto-theology – in other words, throughout his entire history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play'.[63]

Following both of these philosophies, Dollimore is convinced that a materialist conception of ideology involves the decentring of man. This means an anti-essentialist approach - a rejection of the belief that 'we possess some given, unalterable essence or nature in virtue of which we are human'.[64] Additionally, Dollimore quotes Levi-Strauss' supposition that 'the ultimate goal of the human sciences' is ''not to constitute but to dissolve man''. [65]

Conclusion

Dollimore and Sinfield describe Kott and Tillyard as essentialist humanists. Both Kott and Tillyard's theoretical emphasis originates from Western concepts based on the idea of a centre - an origin, Truth, Essence or God which guarantees all meaning. In Tillyard's case, it is Christianity that allots a spiritual essence to Man with 'the soul' as an essential identity' - the tradition inspired by St. Augustine (354-430), who insisted on the perfection of God and conversely, the depravity of Man and Thomas Aquinas' more optimistic concept of man's mind being 'the very essence of the soul'. Dollimore and Sinfield conclude that Tillyard and Kott's hegemonic and authoritative perspectives ignore, repress and marginalise other possible Shakespeare interpretations.

The point is that both Tillyard and Kott not only represent two responses to Shakespeare but whether implicitly (Tillyard) or explicitly (Kott) they both refer to the European political situation of their day. Shakespeare is interpreted in the context of that situation and the reading seems to enhance Shakespeare's authority from the critics' political standpoint. Tillyard, writing during the Second World War, was likely to think 'the Elizabethan habit of mind' would help to secure peace – that its neglect 'by our scientifically minded intellectuals has helped not a little to bring the world into its present conflicts and distresses'. [66] Kott on the other hand, writing as a Pole for whom Nazi occupation was followed by a Stalinist regime, strongly believed Shakespeare 'views the implacable mechanism without medieval awe, and without the illusions of the early Renaissance. The sun does not circle round the earth, there is no order of the spheres, or of nature. The King is no Lord's Anointed, and politics is only an art aiming at capturing and securing power'.[67]

If Shakespeare is interpreted in terms of cultural production, which is a reproduction of the existing order, then Kott whilst apparently being radical and subversive, is actually supporting the *status quo*. The same principle could be applied to Tillyard's work. If Tillyard's cultural product (*The Elizabethan World Picture*) was shaped by the particular institutions of his education (Master of Jesus College, Cambridge 1945-1959) or religion (Christian), then Dollimore and Sinfield's supposition seems valid. But how far can these two very different critics be identified together in the context of ideology? What account needs to be taken of their very different cultural and intellectual formations? In the next chapter, I intend to provide a detailed examination of Jan Kott's early intellectual formation, as a way of beginning to question the parallel set up by Dollimore and Sinfield.

Endnotes

[1] John Elsom, ed., *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary*? (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 8.

[2] Elson, *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary,* p.2.

[3] Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), p.6. The book will be further referred to as *SOC.*

[4] Kott, *SOC,* p. 6.

[5] Kott, *SOC,* pp.45, 48.

[6] Elsom, *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary,* p.2.

[7] Martin Esslin, 'Preface' to *Shakespeare Our Contemporary,* p. xx.

[8] Adam Michnik, 'Gogol Venom: A Study in Lost Illusion', *Partisan Review,* LXVII/3/2000 from http://www.bu.edu./partisanreview/archive/2000/3michnik.html (accessed on 16/11/01)

[9] Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare: New Harvester Readings* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 4.

[10] David Williams, *Directors' Theatre* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1988).

[11] Jan Kott, 'At King Lear', *European Review,* hhttp:/www.c3.hu/~eufuzetek/en/cont/9kott.html (accessed on 6/12/01).

[12] Dennis Kennedy, ed., *Foreign Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 9.

[13] Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and Ideology: the instance of Henry V' , in *Alternative Shakespeare,* John Drakakis, ed., (London: Methuen, 1985), p.208.

[14] Kott, *SOC,* p. 47.

[15] E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays (* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) , p. 237. The book will be further referred to as *SHP* .

[16] Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture (* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1943), p.13. The book will be further referred to as *EWP* .

[17] Raymond Williams, 'Afterword' in Dollimore and Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare (*Manchester: Manchester University Press, *1985),* pp. 233-234.

[18] Ryan, *Shakespeare: New Harvester Readings,* p. 4.

[19] Dollimore and Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare,* p. 5.

[20] Dollimore and Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare,* p. 5.

[21] Dollimore and Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare,* p. 5.

[22] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 207.

[23] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 208.

[24] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 208.

[25] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 210.

[26] Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1984), p. 20.

[27] Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy,* pp. 22, n274.

[28] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 207.

[29] Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy,* p. 5.

[30] Compare the speech of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* in Act 1.iii 85-105.

[31] See, for example, in *Richard II* Act II. Sc. I. 188-209 when York attempts to remind Richard that all artistic privileges are guaranteed and supported as a result of blood inheritance.

[32] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 207.

[33] Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 69.

[34] Tillyard, *SHP*, p.237.

[35] Kott, *SOC*, p. 48.

[36]Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 92.

[37] Lily Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirror of Elizabethan Policy*, (1936, London: Methuen, 1964), p.122.

[38] Kott, *SOC*, pp. 6-7.

[39] Tillyard, *SHP*, p.43.

[40] Kott, *SOC*, p.20.

[41] Alan Bloom, *Szekspir i polityka* (Krakow: Arcana, 1995).

[42] Tillyard, *SHP*, p.64.

[43] Tillyard, *SHP*, p.64.

[44] Tillyard, *SHP*, pp. 66-67.

[45] Kott, *SOC*, p.151.

[46] Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare*, p. 10.

[47] Leszek Kolakowski, 'Kaplan i Blazen', *Tworczosc* 9 (1959), pp. 65-85.

[48] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 214.

[49] Tillyard, *SHP*, pp. 7-8.

[50] Tillyard, *SHP*, p. 305.

[51] Dollimore and Sinfield, *Op.cit*, p. 215.

[52] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 211.

[53] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 208.

[54] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 210.

[55] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p.210.

[56] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 210.

[57] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 210.

[58] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 211.

[59] Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 18.

[60] Loius Althusser, *For Marx*, (London : New Left Books, 1977), p. 228.

[61] Althusser, *For Marx*, p.229.

[62] Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 201.

[63] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 292.

[64] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.18.

[65] Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 247.

[66] Tillyard, *EWP*, p. 102.

[67] Kott, *SOC*, p. 48.

Chapter Two

Kott's formative years – The apostle or victim of the dominant ideology?

Theories of the ultimate unity of both history and human subject derive of course from a western philosophical tradition [...] The alternative to this is not to become fixated with its negation – universal chaos and subjective fragmentation- but rather to understand history and the human subject in terms of social and political process. Crucial for such understanding is a materialist account of ideology.[1]

J. Dollimore and A. Sinfield.

Introduction

By looking at the development of Kott's critical thinking, literary and philosophical influences, this chapter investigates to what extent Kott's intellectual formation was a product of the dominant ideology. The aim is to provide an understanding of the complexity of Kott's development within the particular conditions of post-war Poland. Was Kott a victim of ideology or a radical thinker who successfully challenged the predominant ideology? Does the Theatre of the Absurd, as interpreted by Kott, lead to hostility to positive political action, and consequently, to a sense of the futility of human existence? And finally, was Kott an apostle or a victim of the dominant ideology? In order to establish Kott's relation to the dominant ideology it is essential to look into the biographical and historical contexts of Kott's early formation. Part Two of the chapter will focus on Kott's involvement in the social and cultural life of Poland, between 1946-1968, as a propagator of 'socialist realism' and 'velvet prisoner' of State cultural policy. These will be laid out in a chronological fashion, explaining, above all, Kott's transitions from propagandist/apologist for social realism to dissident post-Marxist intellectual.

As argued in the previous chapter, Dollimore and Sinfield presuppose that Kott is a prime example of the mechanism of ideology which 'works to legitimate the social order – especially by the process of representing sectional or class interests as universal ones'. [2] Furthermore, Kott, according to Dollimore and Sinfield, ignores the fact that there exist other, subordinate classes that do not share the interest of the dominant class, and thus are the subject of exploitation. For Dollimore and Sinfield, Kott's most fundamental error in his account of the role of ideology is 'falsely to

unify history and/or the individual subject'. [3] In their view, Kott's concept of history is unified by what they describe as an inversion of Tillyard's teleological principle conferring meaningful order through what Kott describes as an 'implacable roller'. Kott interprets Tudor Myth as an apolitical device and apparently, as Dollimore and Sinfield claim, questions Tillyard's providential view, according to which historical process underwent reiterated cycles and was perceived in terms of sin and punishment. Yet, for Dollimore and Sinfield, Kott and Tillyard are 'two sides of the same conservative coin' and 'Kott does little more than invert the Elizabethan World Picture: the terms of the debate are not changed'.[4]

Tillyard strongly believes in the idea of cosmic order which legitimated the social and political order in Elizabethan England. Kott, however, reveals a more 'sceptical' and 'pessimistic' attitude leading to a 'hostility to positive political action', as reflected in the alienation scenarios of the Theatre of the Absurd.

In addition, Dollimore and Sinfield provide their alternative, which is 'not to become fixated with negation – universal chaos and subjective fragmentation - but rather to understand history and the human subject in terms of social and political process'.[5] In their materialist account, ideology 'is not just a set of ideas; it is material practice, woven into the fabric of every life. At the same time, the dominant ideology is realised specifically through the institutions of education, the family, the law, journalism and culture'. [6] From this perspective, Shakespeare can be interpreted as a form of cultural production, which may be a reproduction of the existing order. Consequently when Kott is apparently being radical and subversive, he is actually supporting the *status quo*.

Biographical notes

Jan Kott's literary and political life constitutes a paradigm of the history of the Polish intelligentsia and provides an insight into the constant interaction between literature and politics, between the culture of the past and the culture of the present. Torn between criticism and theatre, Shakespeare and communist ideology, Poland and his life in exile, Kott's career illustrates the anxiety of his generation engaged in post-war cultural politics. Born in 1914 in Warsaw, Kott came from a Jewish family with a strong literary tradition. His great-great grand father Hilary Nausbaum was the author of *A History of the Jews*, and the translator of the *Pentateuch* and *Torah* into Polish. Kott's Uncle Jozef Nausbaum Hilarowicz, was one of the initiators of the Darwinist movement in Poland. At the age of five, Kott, among whose family there had been many converts, was baptised into the Roman Catholic Church at the Holy Cross in Warsaw. As Kott reveals in his biography, his father Maurycy, baptised him as he 'felt otherwise there would be no future for [him] among Poles'. [7] Maurycy's thoughtful decision appeared a great advantage among the Nazi occupants and subsequently saved Kott from concentration camps and death.

Kott initially studied at the University of Warsaw where Stefan Zolkiewski, a Marxist literary critic, significantly influenced his work. Between 1938-39, owing to a grant from the French Institute in Warsaw, Kott went to Paris to continue his postgraduate studies and to pursue his literary interests. Under the impact of Tristain Tzara, Mme Apollinaire, André Breton, Jacques and Raissa Maritain, Kott immersed himself in the study of French surrealism. Yet, his initial interest in Apollinaire as the publisher of de Sade's works, on whom he was to write his Ph.D. dissertation,

gradually waned. Kott was 'experiencing some sort of breakdown', he 'felt empty, as though [he] had suddenly vomited everything that [he] had eaten'. [8] Instead of going to the Bibliothéque National to study de Sade, Kott found himself, on Breton's advice, in a Dominican monastery to recreate his inspiration and energy. At the beginning of August 1939 Kott and his future wife Lydia returned to Poland, leaving behind an 'old suitcase with his diary and the notes for [his] dissertation on Apollinaire and the frightful Marquis de Sade'. [9] Yet, Kott's interest in surrealism did not wane entirely. He returned to it in his post-war *Mythology and Realism* (1946) although this time he approached the subject from a different perspective.

During the Second World War, Kott served in the Polish army and participated in the defence of Warsaw. The Poles failed, Kott managed to cross the Eastern (Soviet-German) border illegally and moved to Lwow, which at the time still belonged to Poland. In Lwow, Kott joined other pro-Communist writers who organised themselves into a Polish Writers' Union. Due to expansive Soviet cultural policy and its inevitable annexing of Ukraine into the USSR, Kott and his colleagues joined the Profspilka , the Writers' Union of the Western Ukraine and by doing so they found themselves under the control of Soviet censorship. As Kott writes in his biography 'a kind of terror was in the air, slowly infecting everyone, and there was widespread belief in the omniscience and omnipresence of the NKWD'.[10] As a result, Kott returned to Warsaw where he joined the Soviet-backed PPR (Polish Workers' Party) and AL (People's Army - a left-wing Moscow-backed army) and the opponent of the AK (Home Army). Kott's army activities had a significant impact on his literary and political life. It was in the AL unit where Kott met Marian Spychalski, who was later to become the Minister of Defence and Chairman of the

Council of the State. During the wartime he also met comrade Tomasz, who later became known as Boleslaw Bierut, the First Secretary of the Polish communist government. Kott describes his encounter with communism,

> I had been attracted to communism at the university, I belonged to the Polish Democratic Youth [...] I installed a mail drop in my grandparents apartment [...] I got clubbed on the head at illegal demonstrations almost always held in the Jewish district, I spent nearly a week in a separate cell for communists in the prison [...] Soon thereafter the Polish Communist party was dissolved by Comitern on Stalin's orders. Polish communists were summoned to Moscow from Poland, France and Germany; they ended up with a bullet in their neck [...] the most fortunate were sent to the gulags. In Paris, I had associated with an international group of Trotskyites. [...] I took the oath of a soldier in the People's Army [...] certainly I did not know that those few sentences on cigarette paper, burned immediately thereafter in the gas flame of the stove, would weigh so heavily on my life, but I knew that I was making a choice. [11]

After the war Kott continued his academic career, received his doctorate at University of Lodz and then became a lecturer in Polish literature at the University of Warsaw. In 1963, Kott researched at St Antony's College, Oxford, and first visited America in 1966 acting as a visiting professor at Yale and Berkeley universities. In 1968, Kott emigrated to the United States where he held position as lecturer at Yale University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Apart from research and teaching, Kott was active as a literary and theatre critic. Kott's study of Shakespeare gained him recognition among numerous theatre practitioners, in particular, Peter Brook and Peter Hall from the *Royal Shakespeare Company*, which has been regarded as the centre of Shakespeare studies. Kott was one of the advisory editors of *New Theatre Quarterly* since the

publication of the original *Theatre Quarterly* and to which he also was a regular contributor. In his 1968 *Theatre Notebook*, Kott describes his theatre experiences, from Japanese Noh to a Neapolitan Harlequin. In 1973 Kott published *The Eating of the Gods* in which he examines Greek tragedy. In his *The Theatre of Essence* (1984), Kott further examines theatre and its application in everyday life. Grotowski and other Polish playwrights and directors particularly inspire Kott. Kott's The *Bottom Translation* (1987) is an exploration of essentially dialogical ideas, embodying a carnivalesque anti-authoritarian politics.

Kott's contribution to dramatic and literary criticism is largely due to his interpretation of Shakespeare, which will be further discussed in the following chapter of this dissertation. Kott's work on Shakespeare was originally published in 1961 under the title of *Szkice o Szekspirze* [12]. The Revised Version *Szekspir Wspolczesny* appeared in 1964 [13] and two further editions in 1997 and 1999 [14]. In 1965 the English version under the title *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* [15] was published. In addition to its Polish and English version, the book has been translated into nineteen languages, reaching readers all over the world.

A. Jan Kott, Intellectuals and Stalinism

Before drawing conclusions, let us have a closer look at Kott's intellectual development and the shifting stages that characterise his criticism, from his engagement with socialist realism, existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd, to his political standpoints from Marxism to post-Marxism.

While being a member of the Party and AL (Armia Ludowa), Kott started his *Mitologia i Prawda* (Mythology and Realism), which finally appeared in 1946 and was revised in 1956. The publication was a manifestation of Kott's attitude towards the established cultural policy. Kott radically changed his critical perspective toward any form of experimentation in literary or artistic form, particularly surrealism. He claimed that surrealism characterised the pre-war period literature while a new reality and the new cultural policy of socialist realism forced a new approach. The new literature, therefore, should challenge the old one by providing a new image of the human condition; an image that places a human being in concrete social circumstances, not in the murky sphere between dreams and reality. In his call for realism, Kott argued that 'the measure of realism in a literature is the understanding of the historical process in its contradictions and its development, the truth about man who creates history and who is subject to its laws: moral truth and psychological truth'. [16]

In assessing the avant-garde and surrealism, Kott maintained that the inter-war generation of bourgeois intellectuals grew to believe that the social, economic and political conditions in which they lived should be improved, as they were inappropriate and senseless. In the avant-garde, the literary generation found their

way to express their own contempt for reality, which gradually was manifested in tragedy and finally on the eve of the Second World War in catastrophism. Kott believed that WWII changed the human condition to a greater extent than the Great War did. This reality went far beyond the expectations or vision of surrealists. The ideas of chaos, the absurd and experimentation were enacted to the limits by fascist practices. Yet, as Kott claimed, the Second World War clearly proved that any escape from reality, any step aside from the bare truth or fact results in a cruel revenge on social groups or on an entire nation. The war successfully challenged all predominant mythologies or fantasies whether of a political, economic or social nature. Hence any rebellion against these rules results in failure or death. Kott maintains that history has its own law and sense, and only those countries that would base their future on realism can be successful. Kott claims that an orthodox surrealist can be either a child or a lunatic. Therefore for him/her, dream and reality, the imagined and the real intermingle in surrealism, cementing the unity of the inner and the outer. Surrealism as opposed to realism based on common sense, comprises all supernatural and unusual features, love, dream, hallucination, sensualism, deviations, all these creating a form of transcendental beauty. [17]

Following his belief in the destructive impact of mythological thought on cultural awareness in the new socialist Poland, Kott severely criticised Joseph Conrad. Originally Polish, Konrad Teodor Korzeniowski was born in 1857 (d. 1924) in a country that at the time did not exist as an independent state, and was subject to authoritarian government by the three partitioning powers (Russia, Prussia and Austria). Conrad, whose family severely suffered from Russian oppression, became an embodiment of inner strength. Though he never produced any literary work in

Polish and finally emigrated to Great Britain, Conrad's heroic characters attracted Polish young audiences and , in particular, Polish soldiers associated with the Home Army, a right-orientated resistance movement. Kott argued against any forms of heroism presented in Conrad's *Lord Jim* and criticised Conrad for putting his characters in a situation where they struggle alone against biological forces.

The New World suggested by a Marxist Kott offered a new set of values - the real values available to any human being. Social reality, unlike the natural order, could be shaped and was not driven by an indifferent nature, by a cruel and determined fate. On the contrary, the social world had been created by and for men and could be shaped by men. The defence of the world order ceased then to be a heroic act of arbitrary choice, and it did not contribute to understanding of the historical process. While Conrad justifies heroism in term of defence of the certain individual values such as honour and dignity till the very end, Kott questioned the utility of this heroism to the common good, concluding that a Marxist perspective was essential. Further, any moral dilemma had to be placed in social reality. Hence it would be always the question of choice that was determined by social circumstances. Conradian faith in oneself was, according to Kott, to have a faith in this concrete social reality, an act of acceptance of the order, which one condemns; it was surrender. Seen from this perspective, Kott believed that it was difficult to build up a socialist community from Conradian character-like people. To illustrate his point of view, Kott made some connection to the Warsaw uprising of the 1944 and sought no reasonable justification to explain the tragedy of those, who in the name of honour and dignity, died and let the city burn down. Kott's comment was seen as an explicit attack on AK soldiers, who participated in the uprising. Despite the fact that

Kott later withdrew from this statement, it was never to be forgiven. By the attack on Conrad's concept of heroism, Kott undoubtedly initiated his career as a propagandist of socialist realism. [18]

Kott's criticism of Conrad in the immediate post- war period in response to the ideological demand for 'socialist realism' also had its bearing on his understanding of 'socialist' Shakespeare. In 1952 Kott became a member of Repertoire Consortium whose main aim was to control Theatre and cinema repertoire. This gave Kott an authority to spread socialist theatre. Consequently, Kott criticised Shakespeare productions which were not in accordance with the dominant cultural and aesthetic tendencies such as the classic productions of Wilhelm Horzyca. Horzyca was severely criticised and finally banned for austere monumentalism, exalted diction, and hieratic/symbolic scenes. Horzyca's sublime, noble style was critiqued for its portrayal of aristocratic taste and values, which was particularly manifested in his production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Wroclaw 1953). Horzica found himself under severe attack for his interpretation of the play. Kott's review of 'Shakespearean Misunderstanding' ('Nieporozumienia Szekspirowskie') became legendary. Kott accused Horzica of an excess of stylisation, most importantly for placing Oberon, Titania and other Shakespeare characters on the steps of the grand stairs. But most of all, Kott criticised the director for the lack of a renaissance and humanistic approach to Shakespeare- for suggesting a hierarchical class division within Shakespeare's world, placing the 'most important characters' on the top of the stairs, and the 'small' characters at the bottom. In his review Kott suggested a Robin Hood-like interpretation, where the Arden forest represents 'an idea of anti-feudal tradition; the idea of a perfect

harmonious and happy life of the folk people, who dream to achieve a renaissance harmony'. [19] The criticism of Kott, who had already established himself as a leading critic and also acted on behalf of the Consortium, seemed to have been a decisive blow to Horzica's career. Horzica's appeal against Kott's criticism could not see daylight till 1988, when it was finally published in *Dialog* 6 (1988). This argument between Horzica and Kott constitutes a paradox, when considering Kott's later enthusiasm for grand stairs in his interpretation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* entitled 'Bitter Arcadia'. Also Kott's criticism of blind Fate, against which Conradian characters struggle, becomes very significant in his later reading of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. It can be argued that Kott's reading of Conrad in *Mitologia i Prawda* (1946), has been radically reinterpreted in his book on Shakespeare, in which Conradian heroes, like those of Shakespeare, are individuals struggling against the Grand Mechanism. Before reconsidering his critical perspective, Kott continued to immerse himself in the battle for socialist realism, particularly in a hard left Lodz journal *Kuznica* (*The Forge*), which was established by Kott's pre-war Warsaw University circle colleagues.

Kuznica contributors were all engaged in the battle for broad realism in literature and arts, promoting the Soviet model of socialism, introduced in Poland by Sokorski, Minister of Culture in 1949. The *Kuznica* circle, Kott wrote in the weekly, sprang from people who propagated a new programme of nationalisation of industry and sought to promote empirical humanistic values. The journal, with its Editor-in-Chief, Stefan Zolkiewski and the Editorial board with Nalkowska, Jastrun, Wazyk, Herz and Rudnicki was to serve as a 'great tribune of the progressive intelligentsia'. The magazine's credo was closely linked with the Polish Enlightenment Movement

centred around Hugo Kollataj (1750-1812). The movement was a 'communist-positivist flagship' fighting against reactionary clericalism, gentry and 'imperialist' Western ideologies. In one of the *Kuznica* issues (51 *Kuznica,* 1948), Kott argued for politicisation (upolitycznienie) of culture; for a close co-operation among party leaders, social activists and artists. It is perhaps interesting at this point to quote Kott's propaganda postulate,

> It is only through the Party that we are able to fight against petit bourgeois tastes in literature and art; it is only through active and disciplinary participation in the class struggle and through social and political experience, that we can resist nihilism; and till the final victory we can consciously fight against the dark night of imperialism [read 'capitalism'], and clean our culture and moral values from the lime-scale of all mythologies, that had been created in the times of man's exploitation. [20]

Kott went on to argue that there is no distinction between 'high' or 'popular' culture. If in the weekly, an article on recent market prices is placed next to an article on transformation within literary trends, it means that the prices, literary trends or schools are all 'ingredients' of humanistic reality. These can be shaped in an objective and realistic way, regardless of the moral or political attitudes of the authors.

In addition Kott participated in philosophical debates. In an article on 'New Year's resolutions' published in *Kuznica* in 1947, Kott criticised Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), a French philosopher, who significantly influenced, as Kott suggests, the surrealism movement. Raised as a Protestant, Maritain converted to Roman Catholicism in 1906. His most acclaimed achievement was in epistemology, in which he examined the different degrees of knowledge and their interrelations, and in political philosophy. Maritain believed in Christian humanism (Integrated

Christianity), which was based on love and truth, freedom and fraternity. On the question of Man, Maritain claimed,

> Man is no longer the creature and image of God, a personality which implies free will and is responsible for an eternal destiny, a being which possesses rights and is called to the conquest of freedom and to a self achievement consisting of love and charity. He is a particle of the social whole and lives by the collective conscience of the whole and his happiness and liberty lies in serving the work of the whole. This whole itself is an economic and industrial whole; its essential and primordial work consists of the industrial domination of nature. There is a thirst for communism, but communism is sought in economic activity, in pure activity, which, considered as the locus proprius and homeland of human activity, is only a world of a beheaded reason, no longer made for truth, engulfed in a demiurgic task of fabrication and domination over things. [21]

Kott claimed that in a pre-war period 'intellectuals could be divided into three groups: believers, non-believers and Thomists'. Hence, Maritain and his concept of neo- Thomism in the post war period, turned out, according to Kott, to be a 'masquerade unable to explain sufficiently science of knowledge'. Further, he went to argue 'a builder cannot build a roof and still believe it was not him but an angel who built it'. [22] Kott also claimed that in the post-war reality, the marriage between believers and rationalists had reached its end. While in post-war Western countries, Maritain's moral and political philosophy significantly influenced the work on human rights, including the United Nation Declaration of 1948, and a number of national declarations such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the preamble to the Constitution of the Fourth French Republic (1946), Kott was determined to demolish the impact of Maritain in Poland. As a result the 'sect of intellectual friends of the Church' was forced to face a reconsideration of their attitude towards Maritainism that in Catholicism sought a cultural dialectical process to understand and evaluate social and historical order. Moreover, Kott severely

criticises the Church and the Vatican whose moral and political authority was questioned. He also attacks catholic intellectuals, like Maritain, who from 1945 to 1948 was ambassador of France to the Vatican, supporting Vatican policy. Marxists, Kott continues, can act as apostles of the new secular state.

Kott's encounter with Maritain's ideas of Integrated Humanity dates back to the pre-war period and his association with the Laski circle, and then his Paris meeting with Maritain. The Laski circle, was 'an oasis within the parochial world of Polish Catholicism, which was openly, or at least secretly, anti-Semitic and shunned any sign of modernism like the plague; at the time when the word ecumenism was almost unknown, Laski was a meeting place for believers and agnostics, a dialogue of various credos or, even more, a dialogue of anxieties'.[23]

Kott referred to Maritain's moral and political philosophy in his article 'Katolicki sens dramatu Rimbauda' (The Catholic Meaning of Rimbaud's Drama) published in 2 *Verbum*, (1938). [24] In his study on Rimbaud, Kott follows Maritain who distinguishes between the human being as an individual and as a person. Therefore, human beings are individuals who are related to a common social order of which they are an integral part. Kott believed that it is in virtue of a human being's personality that he/she cannot be subordinated to that social order. Similarly to Maritain, Kott put an emphasis on the value of the human person who could be described as a persona poised between individualism and socialism. He promotes Maritain's idea of integral Christian Humanism - integral as it considers the individual human being, an entity that has both material and spiritual dimensions, and as a unified whole since it sees human beings in society as participants in a

common good. While for Kott it was Marxist order, for Maritain, however, the best political order is one that recognises the sovereignty of God, with a political society that is both personal and pluralist as well as inspired by Christianity (civic fraternities). Further, Kott believed that in the dialectical process of culture communism was the final stage of anthropological rationalism; he strongly believed at that time in communist dreams of an all-embracing emancipation and its attempt to substitute the universality of Christianity to its own earthly universality.

Kott argued that Maritain's theoretical assumption inspired the surrealism movement, yet, when in 1935 leading figures of the movement withdrew from the Party, Kott like the surrealists failed to believe in a successful marriage of surrealism and communism. This failure, Kott argued, lay in the fact that the movement was the rebellion of a young Western artistic generation against the civilisation that justified the existence of the First World War. [25] Kott's engagement with Maritain's concepts suggests significant shifts in his critical perspective. In the pre-war period, Kott was an admirer of Maritain and, like him, Kott believed in the union between social community (Christian integrity) and artistic activities. It was the external factors of an ideological nature in the post war period that contributed to the change of Kott's reading of Maritain. Maritain's scholastic thought was not in accordance with secular cultural policy and the political establishment. Kott seemed to have criticised Maritian for ideological reasons. Perhaps the fear of becoming an ideological enemy of People's Poland was stronger than Kott's genuine response to Maritian.

It was later that the anticlerical Kott made an implicit link between surrealism, Thomists (Maritain's followers) and the work of Gyorgy Lukacs, which

also inspired his later reading of Shakespeare. Kott wrote,

> Critical realism was for Lukacs the highest achievement of bourgeois literature. And according to the Marxist theory of literary evolution, it should have been not only the precursor of but also the model for socialist realism. [...] I was fascinated by the idea of great turning points in history. The surrealists and Lukacs had something in common: they both hated naturalistic description. The Thomits also shared these antitastes of mine. [26]

But Kott was still strong in his belief in the existing government cultural policy, claiming that it did not mean a conformist attitude on the part of the authors. This gesture of recognition, which reflected the post-war Soviet policy towards writers, was also adopted in Poland. Instead of bullying intellectuals, the Party leadership flattered the artists and entered into an undemonstrative co-operation with them. The State secured writers' existence by provision with prizes, awards, and gifts but also travel opportunities. The most promising and devoted to the system were awarded trips to Moscow and Eastern Bloc countries, those with less potential were sent behind the iron curtain.

With regard to censorship control, the collective leadership engaged in the 'gentle revolution' encouraged writers to focus on the 'meaning of the war' and the new order' rather than 'on the experiences on the war' and the destruction of the old one'. Hence writers enjoyed state-subsidised royalties and large prints runs. The censorship was limited to the issues clearly stated and forbidden as a threat to national security. Towards the end of 1940s, the Sovietisation of the Polish economy and cultural life increased. Despite the Party's postulates for adopting socialism as 'the sole artistic method of artistic creativity', there was a certain allowance for artistic freedom of expression. This policy, initiated in the mid-1950s, was reinforced

after Stalin's death and encouraged intellectuals to believe in the vital role of culture in building a new post-war society under their leadership. Milosz Haraszti, a Hungarian writer, describes the Party's policy towards writers in his Country as a 'velvet prison', which compared to 'gentle revolution' practices in Poland. [27] Haraszti, while writing about Hungarian intellectuals of the post-Stalinist period, states they were 'velvet prisoners in a velvet prison' in which the State controlled the media, set the agenda and determined public debates. Such a prison, he goes further, was a nice comfortable place to live in and only the privileges reminded them of the sense of guilt. The Velvet prisoners faced a dilemma whether to conform or to rebel, and by doing so, put their material security and conformity at stake.

When asked if the state policy restricted artistic expression, Kott was convinced at this time that any choice, even that of an ideological nature is not a form of restriction. In *Kuznica* Kott criticised integral existentialism inspired by Maritain's thought,

> When the ways and objectives and their commitment in promoting a new social order are given as targets - artists are put in the position to choose and bear the consequences of their choice. From an illusionist perspective this may seem a limitation to some integral existentialist (read a Thomist) we are not afraid to say: limitation, choice, selection- are the basic criteria for creation of any piece of art. The choice of ideology and attitude is also a choice that an artist has to face. [...] New brave perspectives await the new literature and radical art with all its engagement in the social world. [28]

As Adam Michnik, Editor-in-Chief of the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, an independent national newspaper established in 1989, writes, 'without an understanding of the *Kuznica* phenomenon, the phenomenon of betrayal by intellectuals and their

subsequent redemption, it is impossible to understand the history of the Polish intelligentsia, and perhaps the history of Poland'.[29] In 1957, Kott and other writers associated with *Kuznica* left the party. As Michnik says, 'until then, no one had ever left the Party: the only way out was expulsion'. [30] This gesture had therefore, a symbolic significance. The former *Kuznica* enthusiasts of 'socialist realism', who acted as 'tools of totalitarian dictatorship' urging the Polish intelligentsia to support the communist leadership, were now publicly in opposition to the establishment.

B. Kott's Captive Mind

Towards the mid-1950s, Kott was very aware of the growing Sovietisation of the Polish culture and economy, and felt he could not freely express himself as a writer and commentator on cultural, political or social events. From the perspective of half a century, he thought of himself as having been a velvet prisoner in the state regime. Like many Polish intellectuals, Kott faced a dilemma, torn between his duty as a writer and as a propagator of prevailing ideology. The existence of this problem is the main cause of 'the explosion' of existentialist moods in Polish philosophical circles which, traditionally, have tended to seek solutions within the rational, even the positivist, framework. The question of moral responsibility is linked by a thousand threads with the problem of the individual – his status and fate. The attitude of the Polish intelligentsia towards the dominant ideology could be described as 'captivity'- the term used by Czeslaw Milosz. Milosz uses the concept to describe the situation of culture, the human condition, and the predicament of Polish intellectuals in the prevailing circumstances in which intellectual and artistic creativity developed under the totalitarian regime. [31]

In his analysis of modern society in its 'captive state', Milosz wrote 'those who thought they might succeed, while remaining within the Eastern Block, in keeping clear of total orthodoxy and maintaining some degree of freedom of thought, have been defeated'. [32] Kott was aware of this. He left the country and sought political asylum in the United States. Milosz too emigrated to the States, and Leszek Kolakowski, Kott's friend and inspiration, found a place for intellectual freedom in Oxford. To understand the course of events that characterised post-war Poland, it is necessary to realise that pre-war social conditions called for extensive reforms. It must further be understood that Nazi rule had occasioned a profound disintegration of the existing order of things. In these circumstances, the only hope was to set up a social order, which would be new, but would be a copy of the Russian regime. So what was planned in Moscow as a stage on the road to servitude, was willingly accepted in the countries concerned as true progress.

Kott's initial enthusiasm for socialist realism, which he eagerly practised in *Kuznica*, was temporary. Kott's critical nature not only to the field of literature and art, but to the world around, contributed to his awakening as an active intellectual. In his biography, Kott revealed,

> To a person, we all opted for realism. But what kind of realism? By that time we all knew quite well, although we would never admit it to ourselves even in the dead of night, that socialist realism and Zhdaniovism meant death to all creativity. The problem was how to open the way to socialist realism for after all, that was what we were doing - and yet at the same time somehow get free of it [...] In the *Captive Mind* Milosz [...] describes the games we played with the demon of double thinking. [33]

Under these new political circumstances initiated by the XXth Congress Party, at which Stalin's crimes were officially revealed (the post-thaw period), Kott was particularly inspired by Lukac's idea that 'the drama of the protagonist is the drama of history'. Kott 'learned form Lukacs' and 'showed the workings of the Grand Mechanism in Shakespeare's history plays [...] My theory of the Grand mechanism was cited for more than a decade in all programs accompanying productions of Shakespeare's royal tragedies in England. [...] In Peter Hall [...] the scenery reminded unchanged. The Usurper climbed the same stairs, and from the throne at the top of those stairs the Anointed, wearing the same crown, were toppled. The Grand Mechanism became visible on stage'. [34]

In this post-thaw period, Kott expressed his disillusionment with the State policies that made writers paralysed since there were no officially established criteria for literary judgement, and writers had lived under a constant fear of being accused for being 'subjective ideological enemies'. At the Ninth Session of the Council of Culture (1956, March 24-25), a question of 'revisionism' ('rewizjonizm') was discussed. In his paper on 'Revolutionary Art and Modernism', published later as 'Mythology and Truth', Kott claimed that 'so far Marxist tools of analysis have been applied to the past and not to the present. The perception of ideological leaders in a mythical light (glory), which had dominated the ideological struggle and had been supported by an intensification of class struggle, has led consequently to the ''emergence'' of ''enemies of Poland's people'' '. [35] The role of art, according to Kott, was to legitimise the regime and not the system; it degenerated into laudatory, exalting and pompous art. Kott went on to emphasise that in his view, fatalism in the critical discourse of the official ideology did reflect some of the characteristic

features of Marxism but that art was being used by the Party to legitimise itself rather than the philosophy the Party was expected to provide. The Soviet concept of the existing order that was to be always good, appropriate and desirable heavily influenced Polish art. Kott claimed that art no longer told the truth, nor reflected the modern human condition and its place in reality, but provided a fictitious version - 'mythologisation' - of reality. The contemporary history seemed part and parcel of that great myth and falsehood. Kott continued the discussion on the pages of *Przeglad Kulturalny* (Cultural View) and claimed only a 'writer's moral force and determination to oppose, his zeal and will to serve the truth, never to reconcile himself to mythology, would guarantee the future of Polish Literature and culture'. [36] Kott also argued that strangulation of Polish culture had its origin in the Zdahnovian pre-war period when literature had ceased to reflect the spiritual life of the revolution and instead, became part of the myth of socrealism. As a result of the 'poisoning' of Soviet and subsequent Polish cultural life, socialist realism (socrealism) was 'a monumental blind alley'. Under these new historical circumstances, Kott went on to argue, a Polish writer's moral duty was to demythologise cultural life and to attempt to work out its future.

When, in the mid-1960s, the Party renewed calls for social realism, particularly practising a severe control of the press system and book-publishing policies, Kott, along with another thirty-three writers and academics, signed a letter protesting against the State. Specifically they were demonstrating against the restrictions on paper for book and magazines publications, the restriction of print runs and the increasing number of titles subject to press control, believing that these things threatened the development of a national culture. A petition of over 600 loyal

party members condemned the letter (dubbed the 'Letter of Thirty-Four') submitted to Cyrankiewicz, the Prime Minister. As a result, 14 signatories of the Letter of Thirty-Four, including Kott himself were banned from getting their works published in any magazine or journal, and their names could not be mentioned unless in academic works. The restriction was later abolished.

The growing dissatisfaction with State control policies, the constant 'guarding' of the people, reached its climax with the abolition of a production of *Part Three* of Adam Mickiewicz's nineteenth century romantic epic, *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve). The play staged at the National Theatre in Warsaw was to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, and it had been previously approved by the Ministry of Culture. The soviet interpretation emphasised connections between the revolutionaries of Poland and their Soviet comrades, who side by side stormed the Winter Palace. The play occupies a significant position in Polish cultural life and belongs to national cultural heritage. It came out of experience of struggle against partition (1796-1918) and portrayed the 19th Soviet's despotism, roguishness and violent repression against Poles. The Warsaw performance with such lines as 'Moscow only sends rogues to Poland' aroused anti-Soviet feelings after the performance. Gomulka, who had been present at the theatre, had to send the Militia troops to suppress the patriotic demonstration in the front of Mickiewicz's Monument. On the opening night, Kott wrote,

> In the stalls and in the balcony, people were in tears. The stagehands cried, the cloakroom attendants wiped their eyes with their handkerchiefs. Forefathers' Eve was stunning. It gave rise to lengthy late-night discussions... it was more powerful than all the contemporary plays of the decade. It spoke about our history and about modern times.... All of Poland is a gigantic stage, and the young people, officer cadets and writers, patriots

> and traitors, are the actors. Novosiltsov and his gang of thugs and spices, and Bestuzev with his hand held out. ... We need to say it as clearly as possible. We are storming the communist heaven, and Mickiewicz is with us in our endeavour. Our 'forefathers' are on the side of revolution and those who are clamouring for justice. [37]

The New Culture, a cultural weekly, launched a survey among Polish artists and intellectuals to evaluate their contribution to the promotion of new literature between 1945-1955. Kott rather reluctantly responded to the survey, saying it 'forced' him to answer why he abandoned his literary criticism. [38] Commenting on the books written between 1945-1955, Kott claimed he would prefer to have more books implicitly discussing contemporary issues, not necessarily of literary character, but dealing with the moral and political practices, deceit, moral and ethical dilemmas of a Party member, rather than books that were too distant, full of allusions and literary metaphors. Kott mentioned his colleagues from the pre-war Warsaw Circle of Polonists, who used to belong to the radical intelligentsia, admiring the avant-garde, but now fell under the influence of the Party. Further, he mentioned his wartime when he sought inner power and strongly believed that the History had its own reason. Kott also wrote that his book on *Mitologia i realism* was not only about

> a few chapters on people and the works of Conrad. Now Conrad sounds strange. But then [...] Conrad was a living legend for Home Army supporters and the best, the most decent among all the supporters. They found in Conrad, the defence of their dignity, which encourages them to fight and not to leave the battlefield; they found in Conrad a passion for internal tragedy and the justification for their spiritual solitude with all contempt for socialist values. They read in Conrad the defence of the moral right of an individual that stands above the history.[39]

This reinterpretation of Conrad finds its full expression in Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary.* It is in this cultural and political environment, encouraged by

the denunciation of Stalin's crimes in 1956, that Kott turned his literary interests toward Shakespeare. Edward Czerwinski, a Polish theatre critic, claims the series of articles on Shakespeare and his characters by Kott in the early sixties is 'the notable body of criticism and the one which most effectively and decidedly planted the roots of contemporary criticism in Poland'.[40] Further in dealing with contemporary criticism in Poland, Kott stands out as a distinctive figure. Czerwinski points out that Kott was a chief contributor to the 'Polish school of criticism' by introducing the Theatre of the Absurd in Poland.

The chronological development of Kott's theoretical assumptions can be traced in the issues of *Dialog,* a monthly magazine established during the mid 1950s as a result of the weakening of the State regime, in which Kott formulated his ideas on drama and theatre, in particular, on Shakespeare. [41] *Dialog* constituted a forum for intellectual exchange among leading Polish writers, theatre people and critics. (see Appendix A) The 6th (1957) *Dialog*, presents a forum concerning Beckett's *Endgame* between Kott and other leading critics including Puzyna and Andrzej Stawar.

During the discussion Kott revealed his interest in the philosophy of Leszek Kolakowski. Puzyna and Stawar compared Beckett's imaginary to that of the circus and Biblical drama, 'the entire philosophy of suffering is biblical'. Czerwinski suggests that Kott 'was possibly influenced by the Polish philosopher's argument when Kott was beginning to compose his essays on Shakespeare's relations to the Theatre of the Absurd'. [42] In his essay on Shakespeare's Kings, when reviewing a Warsaw performance of Jacek Woszczerowicz's Richard III (1960), Kott refers to

Kolakowski's metaphor of the Jester and Priest:

> But the actor who plays Richard must have a face. Woszczerowicz's Richard has a broad face and laughs. It is a frightening laughter. The most terrifying kind of tyrant is he who has recognised himself as a clown, and the world as a gigantic buffoonery. Of all actors in the part, Woszczerowicz has been the first thus to interpret Shakespeare. To my mind it is an interpretation with a mark of genius. He begins his performance with buffoonery, and buffoonery is the substance of his part. All his attitudes are those of a clown: the sly and cruel ones, as well gestures of love and power. But buffoonery is not just a set of gestures. Buffoonery is a philosophy and the highest form of contempt: absolute contempt. [43]

Kolakowski's essay on the 'Priest and the Jester', which first appeared in *Tworczosc,* can be described as a statement that characterised the attitudes of Kott and other Polish intellectuals towards society, their place in that social frame, and their attitudes in relation to the Catholic Church ('The Priest') and Communism ('The Jester'). Kolakowski proclaimed,

> We declare ourselves in favour of the philosophy of the Jester; that is, for an attitude of negative vigilance in the face of any absolute. This we do not because we want to argue; in these matters, a choice is an appraisal. We declare ourselves in favour of non-intellectual values inherent in an attitude the perils and absurdities of which we know. It is the opinion for a vision of the world that prospects for a slow and difficult realignment of the elements in our human action that are most difficult to align: goodness without universal toleration, courage without fanaticism, intelligence without apathy, and hope without blindness. All other fruits of philosophy are of little importance.[44]

Kolakowski recognised the role which each political stance plays in every epoch: 'both the priest and the Jester violate the mind: the former by strangling it with catechism, the latter by harassing it with mockery'. [45] Kolakowski's theory is not evidently simply a 'diatribe against the strictures of the Roman Catholic religion and the Church's hierarchy; nor is it an attempt to replace one despot with another

despot. It is rather, an indictment against ''the stabilised world'' '. [46] The Priest can be metaphorically understood as a symbol of the world; the Jester, its antagonist. As Kolakowski claims, 'the Jester's attitude is an endless attempt to reflect on the various arguments of contradictory ideas, an attitude dialectical by its very nature – simply to overcome what is because it is; a Jester does not jeer out of sheer contrariness; he jeers because he mistrusts the stabilised world'. [47] The Jester's role can be strangely compared to that of a ' parasite who destroys in order to survive'; similarly 'in a world where allegedly everything has happened, the Jester's contribution is an always active imagination, which thrives on the residence it must overcome'. [48]

In applying Kolakowski's Priest-Jester metaphor to a Shakespearean character, Kott is 'applying his own standard of judgement and taste to the work'. It is not surprising then, that for Kott, Shakespeare's theatre resembles that of contemporary theatre. Kott described his work as 'the future in an empirical way of thinking, and not ideological way. And rather, an ironic theatre instead of a pathetic one...Experience teaches that classics come alive only when through them the problems of contemporary times are settled'.[49] In his credo to theatre practitioners, Kott stated, 'And now I envision a play from the life of young people, which would limit itself to the sphere of customs and which would be neither a moral protest, nor a declaration of conformism, nor a confession of faith, which would save neither Poland nor the world. I see a play which would grow out of life, and not only of ideological problems'.[50] Kott' supposition was close to the practitioners of Polish Theatre of the Absurd, primly associated with Slawomir Mrozek , the author of *Tango* (Warsaw, 1965), described as a parody of *Hamlet*, and Tadeusz Rozewicz,

best known for his grotesque *Card Index* (Warsaw, 1960).

Esslin attempts to explain the meaning of the 'absurd'. Originally, the word means 'out of harmony', in a musical context. In the common use the word 'absurd' is synonymous with 'ridiculous'. Yet the definitions provided by Camus in the *Myth of Sisyphus* and an essay on Kafka by Ionesco, suggest different explanations. Camus wrote on the human condition in a contemporary world,

> A World that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a Promised Land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. [51]

Similarly Ionesco offers his understanding of the term: 'Absurd is that which is deprived of purpose.... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless'.[52] Kott's understanding of the term bears strong similarities to those presented by Camus and Ionesco. But most of all, he refers to the philosophy of The Fool, the Priest-Jester Metaphor. The role of the fool (court Jester) in Shakespeare is very significant as being beyond mere entertainment.

What interests Kott is the Fool's ability to explore the plurality of meaning. Both Lear and Feste, for example, share a common feature which makes them unique; they are both able to penetrate or to work out the mechanisms of the behaviour of other characters. Lear eventually realises the cruel consequences of his

decision and sees his daughters in their 'real' nature. Similarly, Feste sees the cross-dressing and real intentions of Viola, who admires the clown for his wisdom,

> This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
> And to do that well craves a kind of wit.
> He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
> The quality of person, and the time;
> And, like the haggard, check at every feather
> That comes his eye. This is a practice
> As full of labour as a wise man's art;
> (Twelfth Night, III. i. 56-62.)

Kott's interpretation of *King Lear* was frequently accused of providing a version of nihilism and a sense of the futility of human life. Kott's vision of theatre, and *King Lear* in particular, serves as a 'vehicle of expressing' the modern sensitivity, which does not have to lead to total resignation or futility. When analysing the role of the modern theatre, Kott states,

> This conflict between two philosophies and two types of theatre becomes particularly acute in time of great upheavals. When established values have been overthrown, and there is no appeal, to God, Nature, or History, from the tortures inflicted by the cruel world, the clown becomes the central figure in the theatre. He accompanies the exiled trio – the king, the nobleman and his son- on their cruel wandering through the cold endless night which has fallen on the world; through the 'cold' night which in Shakespeare's King Lear 'will turn us all to fools and madmen'. [53]

Here again, Kott refers to the historical and social context of the world he was living in; the time of upheaval of the 1956, Polish strikes and suppression of culture, the captivity of the mind of himself and his follow intellectuals. It is crucial at this point to understand Kott's interpretation in the context of these circumstances. As Esslin rightly suggested, 'Poland could well be regarded as a focal point of the mid-twentieth century [...] Poland could be relied on to produce outstanding individuals with intelligence and power of perception to record the impact of these archetypal

events with the highest degree of sophistication'. [54]

It can be argued that Poland as a country 'seems to be the embodiment of the Jester-Priest Metaphor, since it is made up of a serious of contradictions of opposing ideologies - Communist and Roman Catholicism being the most obvious example. Its position as a buffer between East and the West is certainly an interesting contradiction; and its status as a nation without political identity for over a hundred years also brings up another subtle conflict'.[55]

Kott was certainly aware of the unique geopolitical position of Poland, and contributed to the enhancement of its cultural heritage, not in a conservative way, as Dollimore and Sinfield suggest. On the contrary Kott described his kind of theatre thus: 'Theatre is politics, didacticism, a coffee-house. If it were not all these, it would be boring. And the government would not give money for it. But sometimes there is theatre with philosophy, with style or, at least, a search for a theatre, a style, and a philosophy'. [56]

Conclusion

What is the relevance of Dollimore and Sinfield's 'Kott debate' in these historically and culturally specific contexts? While Dollimore and Sinfield claim Kott's engagement with the Theatre of the Absurd and existentialism made him hostile to positive political action, leading Kott to alienation and nihilism, Czerwinski argues 'unlike the pessimism and resignation that keynote most of the plays of the French Theatre of the Absurd, Kott's criticism emphasises meanings beyond the obvious, to ''a despair which does not mean resignation'' '. [57] This statement should be understood in the social, historical and political circumstances that forced Kott to express himself freely within the restraints of the State regime.

Paradoxically, Dollimore and Sinfield seem to ignore the political and historical context despite their urge for understanding history and the human subject in terms of social and political process. One of the ways Kott can be perceived as, in fact, a radical thinker was his involvement with existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd. As Esslin, rightly claims,

> No wonder Kott sees the great Shakespearean historical cycle, the Roman plays, and the tragedies as akin in their ultimate sense to the contemporary Theatre of the Absurd. [...] For the Theatre of the Absurd, as I see it, marks the emergence in contemporary art of a position beyond absolutes, beyond even the possibility of closed philosophical systems. It represents a position closely related to that of the post-Marxist thinkers of Easter Europe. And if the Theatre of The Absurd can be regarded as being particularly of our time, then the particular impact of Shakespeare on our time must spring from a deep inner connection between the themes of Beckett or Ionesco and Shakespeare's subject matter. It is Jan Kott's achievement that he saw this relationship with such a force and clarity that for him Hamlet and Lear shed cliché existence as romantic heroes and became members of the family of

Vladimir, Estragon, Berenger, and Chaplin's little tramp.[58]

It was the Theatre of the Absurd, particularly as practised by Brecht, Ionesco and Beckett, that provided assistance to Kott and other Polish critics and theatre practitioners in their fight against socialist realism. Brecht's introduction to the post-war Polish stage and literature seems particularly interesting. After the war Brecht, who had returned from the United States, settled down in Eastern Berlin where he established his famous Berliner Ensemble. Though a party member and a declared communist, Brecht's productions collided with the established norms of socialist realism. Paradoxically, the German authorities decided to send Brecht and his production of *Mother Courage* to Warsaw, with the hope that the play would be severely attacked by 'comrade' Polish critics and audience. Yet, the public and some theatre critics received the production enthusiastically. Brecht's introduction of the Theatre of the Absurd onto the Polish stage was successful, proving that even under the most rigid totalitarian regime, an artistic, highly stylised theatre, using non-realistic means of expression, could be feasible. Brechtian productions that were previously banned in Poland opened a gate for new aesthetic practices that eventually swept socialist realism away, to which process Kott significantly contributed.

Kott's attitude towards the dominant ideology seems to have been two-fold. In the immediate post-war period Kott established himself as a spokesman for the new communist socialist country reflected in his early literary taste, and consequently, his theatre criticism shows evidence of his interest in socialist realism. However, there is another Kott, the Kott after the XXth Party Congress, who radically turns out against the prevailing aesthetic values. Kott shared a similar

opinion with Milosz, who wrote,

> 'Socialist realism' is much more than a matter of taste. [...] It is concerned with the beliefs, which lie at the foundation of human existence. In the field of literature it forbids what has in every age been the writer's essential task – to look at the world from his own independent viewpoint, to tell the truth as he sees it, and so to keep watch and ward in the interest of society as a whole. [59]

Unlike Dollimore and Sinfield's proposition, then, Kott's existentialist approach to literature and in particular to Shakespeare does not necessarily lead to hostility to positive political action and total resignation as embodied in the scenarios of the Theatre of the Absurd. The scenarios of 'Eastern' Theatre of the Absurd were different. Dollimore and Sinfield do not seem to acknowledge this in their accounts of Kott's criticism. According to Martin Esslin, in Western tradition, the Theatre of the Absurd was 'introspective, oblivious of social problems and their remedies – [it] was the very antithesis of the political theatre as preached by Brecht and his followers, or by the official arbiters of the arts in the Soviet Union and her block.' [60] Yet in its Eastern version, 'it is one of the ironies of the cultural history of our times that, after the thaw had set in in Eastern Europe, it was precisely the theatre of Ionesco which provided the model for an extremely vigorous and barbed kind of political theatre'.[61]

Indeed, we can agree with Dollimore and Sinfield's proposition that Kott's literary approach and his political standpoint were shaped by political and historical circumstances. Moreover, Kott could be described as a thinker deeply rooted in the ideology of Western tradition, which unites both history and the human subject, where an individual's interests can stand for a whole society, undermining and

exploiting subordinate classes. This seems to describe the Kott of the immediate post-war period, one of the many Polish intellectuals who propagated and believed in the State cultural policy. But it seems difficult to label Kott as a conservative thinker, especially in the context of social and political processes that described post-war Poland. After the Polish October of 1956, Kott re-emerged as a more mature and self-critical intellectual, who proclaimed literary tastes and a political attitude that seemed radical and subversive. Kolakowski's Priest/Jester metaphor can be considered a definite statement on the attitude of Kott and other Polish intellectuals towards society, their place in the social frame, and their relation to the Catholic Church and communism. [62] This radical image of Kott can be sustained by considering his engagement with existentialism and The Theatre of the Absurd, which were predominantly in opposition to the establishment.

In the final chapter I will argue that Kott's apparent nihilism/absurdism and his interest in Kolakowski's Jester/Priest dichotomy, are essentially dialogical ideas, embodying anti-authoritarian politics, as suggested, for example, by Mikhail Bakhtin. Before doing that, the following chapter will further discuss Kott's attitude to the ideology in the context of the British theatre. When in the late 1960s Kott left Poland the English-speaking readership already knew *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, including some of the directors of the Royal Shakespeare Company. The Company that in the sixties became the international centre for Shakespeare studies was acknowledged for its radical Shakespearian interpretations. In his *Political Shakespeare*, Sinfield investigates the emergence of the Company as a radical cultural site. How then did Kott contribute to the making of an ideology and the radical image of the *Royal Shakespeare Company*? This is the focus of the pages that follow.

Endnotes

[1] Dollimore, J. and Sinfield, A., 'History and Ideology: the instance of *Henry V*', *Alternative Shakespeare*, ed Drakakis, J., (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 210.

[2] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'History and Ideology', p. 210.

[3] Dollimore and Sinfield, *ibid.*, p. 210.

[4] Dollimore and Sinfield, *ibid.* , p.208.

[5] Dollimore and Sinfield, *ibid.* , p. 210.

[6] Dollimore and Sinfield, *ibid.* , p. 211.

[7] Jan Kott, *Still Alive: an Autobiographical Essay* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p.17. Originally published as *Przyczynek do bibliografii* (London: Aneks Publishers, 1990).

[8] Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 20.

[9] Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 28.

[10] Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 35.

[11] Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 91.

[12] Jan Kott, *Szkice o Szekspirze* (Warszawa: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1961).

[13] Jan Kott, *Szekspir Wspolczesny* (Warszawa: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1964).

[14] Jan Kott, *Szekspir Wspolczesny* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997); the second version was published under *Szekspir Wspolczesny II* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Litearackie, 1999).

[15] Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965, 1966, 1974). Translation by Boleslaw Taborski.

[16] Kott, 'Powrot do rzeczywistosci', *Mitologia i prawda* (Warszawa: PIW, 1956). Originally published by *Przeglad kulturalny* 20 (1956), April 20, p.15.

[17] Tadeusz Nyczek, *Jan Kott: Pisma wybrane: Wokol Literatury, Tom I* (Warszawa: Krag, 1991), p. 23

[18] Nyczek, *Jan Kott: Pisma wybrane: Wokol Literatury.*

[19] Jan Kott, 'Midsummer Night's Dreams of the Stairs', *Przeglad Kulturalny* 4 (1953), p.22 ; reprinted under the title of 'Sen Nocy Letniej na schodach', *Jak Wam sie Podoba* (Warszawa: PIW, 1955). Translation of the quote by A.J. Collier.

[20] Jan Kott, *Kuznica* 51 (1948), p. 21. Translated by A.J. Collier.

[21] Jacques Maritain, 'On man' http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/jm502.htm- (25/03/200)

[22] Jan Kott, 'Obrachunki Noworoczne', *Kuznica* 12 (1946) , p 3. Translated by A. J. Collier

[23] Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 16.

[24] Nyczek, *Op.cit.*, pp. 3-11.

[25] In addition to his attacks on Catholic intellectuals, particularly Maritain's Christian humanism, Kott was one of significant 'executors' of the socialist realism propaganda. He took part in sessions of the First Polish Sciences Congress (Warsaw 1951, 29 June –2 July) which was proceeded by an eighteen month press propaganda, and whose main concern was to launch socialist realism campaign in sciences as part of a Six Year Plan For Socialist Country Building. Kott and others (Ossowcy,

Kotarbinski, Gieysztor, Krzyszanowski, Zolkiewski, Wyka, and Wazyk to name but a few) were in charge of 'championing' realism within humanities and social sciences. Hence Kott criticises Polish Fine Arts at a Congress for a lack of enthusiastic approach to life; he also argues for adopting realism in this artistic field.

[26] Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 187.

[27] Milosz Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison* (New York: Farrow, Straus and Giroux, 1989).

[28] Kott, *Kuznica* 51 (1951), p. 15. Translated by A.J. Collier.

[29] Adam Michnik, 'Gogol's Venom: A Study of illusions', *Partisan Review*, 3 (2000), vol LXVII, No 3 after http/www.bu.edu/partisanreview/archive/2000/3/michnik.html accessed on 05/12/2001, p. 18.

[30] Michnik, 'Gogol's Venom', p. 11.

[31] Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (London: Penguin Books, 1985). Originally published by Martin and Warburg in 1953.

[32] Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, p. xii.

[33] Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 188.

[34] Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 188.

[35] Kott, *Przeglad Kulturalny*, (1956), p. 17. Translation by A. J. Collier.

[36] Kott, *Przeglad Kulturalny*, (1956), p. 18. Translation by A. J. Collier.

[37] Michnik, 'Gogol's Venom', p. 8.

[38] Kott, ' Odpowiedz na ankiete *Nowej Kultury*: Pisarze wokol dziesiecilecia' , in Nyczek, *Jan Kott*, pp. 222- 234.

[39] Przeglad Kulturalny, (1956), April 1-7, April 20.

[40] Edward Czerwinski, *Contemporary Polish Theatre and Drama (1956-1984)*, p. 21.

[41] Jan Kott, 'Medea w Pescarze', *Dialog 10 (* 1963), pp. 86-89.

---, 'Paleczka Prospera', *ibid.*, 4 (1960), pp.85-104.

---., 'Król Lear czyli Koñcówka', *ibid.*, 8 (1960), pp.70-80.

---., 'Tytania i glowa osla', *ibid.*, 1 (1964), pp.52-61.

---., ' Dwa paradoksy Otella', *ibid.*, 10 (1964), pp.82-92.

---., 'Gorzka Arkadia Shakespeare'a' , *ibid.*, 9 (1964), pp. 56-78.

---., 'Hamlet i Orestesy' , *ibid.*, 5 (1966), pp.73-84.

---., 'Prospero albo rezyser', *ibid.*, 5 (1982), pp.119-123.

---., 'Jan Kott, Spodek Przetlumaczony', *ibid.*, 5 (1987), pp.104-119.

---., 'Przedmowa do Szekspira wspólczesnego', *ibid.*, 6 (1988), pp.121-124.

---., 'Wciaz Wspólczesny', *ibid.*, 9 (1991), pp.58-62.

[42] Czerwinski, *Contemporary Polish Theatre*, p. 23.

[43] Kott, *SOC*, p. 54.

[44] Leszek Kolakowski, 'Kaplan i Blazen', *Tworczosc* 10 (1956), pp. 65- 85.

[45] Kolakowski, 'The Priest and the Jester', *The Modern Polish Mind*, ed M. Kuncewicz (New York: Little Brown, 1963), p.325.

[46] Kolakowski, 'The Priest and the Jester', p.324.

[47] Kolakowski, 'The Priest and the Jester', p.324.

[48] Kolakowski. , 'The Priest and the Jester', p.324.

[49] Kott, *Dialog* 3 (1958), p.94.

[50] Kott, *Dialog* 3 (1958), p. 94.

[51] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 23.

[52] Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p. 23.

[53] Kott, *SOC*, p. 141.

[54] Esslin, 'Preface to *SOC'*, p. xiv.

[55] Czerwinski, *Contemporary Polish Theatre*, p. 26.

[56] Kott, *Dialog* 6 (1960), p. 157.

[57] Czerwinski, *Contemporary Polish Theatre*, p.21.

[58] Esslin, in 'Preface to *SOC'*, p. xx.

[59] Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, p. xiv.

[60] Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p. 316.

[61] Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p. 316.

[62] Czerwinski, *Contemporary Polish Theatre*, p. 26.

Chapter Three

Kott, Tillyard and the Royal Shakespeare Company: The Making of Ideology

Introduction

Dollimore and Sinfield have argued that a comparison between the criticism of Kott and E.M.W. Tillyard illustrates strong similarities in their critical approaches. Both Kott and Tillyard are powerfully authoritative, appropriating Shakespeare in their making of meaning and ideology. Both Tillyard and Kott make references to experiences of the war: fear, tyranny and suffering. Tillyard finds a Shakespeare who is fundamentally confident about social order based on hierarchical system which 'goes far beyond mere political practices', where 'man's amazing position in creation (described by Tillyard as 'Clapham Junction') exercised the human imagination and fostered the true humanist tradition'.[1] Alternatively, Kott rejects a hierarchical doctrine in social and political life, an apparently nihilistic vision of victims and their executors.

Dollimore and Sinfield acknowledge the fact that both *Elizabethan World Picture* and *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* are cultural documents produced in specific political and cultural conditions. Tillyard, who wrote his book during the Second World War, was convinced that 'our scientifically minded intellectuals have helped not a little to bring the world into its present conflict and distresses'.[2] In his reading of Shakespeare, Kott expressed his own cynicism about political life with its manipulation of public and private life, where for him 'the feverish, paranoid, plot-driven, gossip-driven life of the Warsaw intellectuals and their crumbling grey Stalinist world' [3], suggested an apparently different standpoint.

Sinfield argues that Kott and Tillyard's appropriations of Shakespeare, reflecting these critics' political perspective, was 'repeatedly' appearing not only in criticism, but more importantly in performance by the Royal Shakespeare Company, where 'ideology is made'.[4] Kott's effect on some of the RSC productions, according to Sinfield, was to stress the relevance of modern, post-war reality via Shakespeare's world and also the underlying cruelty of Shakespeare's themes; a cruelty not restricted by political aspects.[5]

Yet, unlike his previous debate with Dollimore, in his essay on 'Royal Shakespeare: Making the ideology'[6] Sinfield is also convinced that Kott was actually contributing to the making of the radical image of the RSC in the 1960s, for Kott 'at least repudiated The World Picture'. Sinfield maintains that this apparent radical identity of the RSC, with its 'adjusting Shakespeare to radical ends', in terms of its establishment status proved 'always, a hindrance'.[7] In doing this, Sinfield seems to contradict or at least to question his previous argument that Kott and Tillyard are 'really two sides of the same conservative coin'. [8] While Sinfield is still convinced that the 'World Picture idea of divinely instituted order is most powerfully conservative', offering 'no hope for humanity and no analysis of the sources and structures of injustice', in contrast Kott, as has been previously shown, finds satisfaction in the idea that kings also (and Hitler and Stalin) are ridiculous victims of history. [9]

How then does Sinfield account for this 'imprecise' critical continuum of his argument regarding Kott and Tillyard? More significantly, how can Kott contribute to the making of the radical identity of the RSC without being actually radical? Is

Sinfield in a position to fully understand Kott's cultural and political origin? Finally how does the adoption by the RSC of Kott's radicalism help us to compare and contrast the critical positions of Kott and Tillyard? Kott's intellectual formation and the shifts of his critical approaches in the social, political and cultural context of Poland were discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter will further explore Sinfield's paradoxical assumptions by examining Tillyard's intellectual formation and Kott's emergence as an influential figure in the British cultural process, particularly their engagement with cultural institutions such as the RSC and Cambridge University.

The Royal Shakespeare Company: an historical context

Sinfield argues that 'in the work of the RSC we may perceive a strain of opportunism, or at least a wish to sustain the company itself' but ' there has also, no doubt, been a great deal of genuine radical purpose'.[10] He also suggests that Brook's effort in the 60s was to develop the radical image of the theatre, but that it was at the same time politically imprecise. Brook's 'Rough Theatre' with its challenge to the traditional Western theatre practices, and his interest in the Theatre of the Absurd, all ignored the realities of political power and political action. Having said this, Sinfield claimed that it was Kott who helped to 'channel initially at least a certain radical impetus' and his criticism was 'certainly more political than the main western academic tradition'. [11]

Sinfield offers a cultural materialist approach, which draws attention to the meanings attributed to cultural commodities like Shakespeare productions/plays or

criticism that are essentially related to the structure of power in society and its ideological formations. From an ideological point of view 'the dominant culture has fully appropriated them [the meanings] to its own use, so that the meanings which it attributes to the commodities [Shakespeare] have come to appear as the only meaning they can express'.[12] In other words, Shakespearean meanings act as cultural signs/tokens that have been invested by the dominant culture and have been considered fixed or 'natural'.

In the context of its situation at the focus of different cultural frames, Sinfield justifies the establishment of the radical image of cultural institutions like the RSC as a challenge to 'the ineluctable status of Shakespeare, the feeling that the main impetus in English society demanded radicalism and relevance, and the idea that the State had a responsibility to support such work'.[13]

Additionally, Sinfield maintains that 'for the left, Cold War paranoia and a proper revulsion from Stalinism inhibited the development of Marxist thought, whilst the apparent complicity of the working class with capitalism raised the question of culture as the agency by which proletarian consciousness was being subverted'. [14] In other words, the working class might have been suffering from 'false consciousness', or the mistakenly 'radical' point of view which served the interests of the dominant class. From this perspective, the trend to establish more radical cultural institutions like the RSC seems to have been reactionary, narrowing the scope of political action and impeding appreciation of the political potential of subordinate cultures. It did help to 'construct a dissident intelligentsia, and its significant political activity is here'.[15]

Hence in the work of the RSC a certain 'strain of opportunism, or at least a wish to sustain the company itself ' may be perceived but 'there has also, no doubt, been a great deal of genuine radical purpose. Theatre was then a cultural site where a new, youthful left-liberal intelligentsia identified itself'.[16] The primary concern of Sinfield is not that 'the RSC should have stayed closer to a true idea of Shakespeare' but that 'it is that the whole business of producing Shakespeare in our society and all the cultural authority which goes with that, [to depend] upon the assumption that through all the metamorphoses to which the plays are subjected we still have the real presence of Shakespeare'. [17] Shakespeare rationalises public and private expenditure of resources and guarantees the scope and quality of attention; he is 'the cultural token' which gives significance to the interpretations directly derived from him. Any alternative productions are, in effect, 'contests for the authority' of Shakespeare; rival attempts to provide alternative positions.[18]

For Peter Brook, 'The history of the plays shows them constantly being re-interpreted and re-interpreted, and yet remaining untouched and intact' [19] ; for Jan Kott, ' Shakespeare is like the world or life itself. Every historical period finds in him what it is looking for and what it wants to see'.[20] Finally, Tillyard praises Shakespeare for being the great national poet.

Peter Hall and Peter Brook in the 1960s were generally considered to have established a radical image for the RSC. Before 1960 the prevailing image of the company was considered conservative. As Dennis Kennedy claims, 'both the teaching and the acting of Shakespeare in English customarily start with a deep study

of the linguistic clues in the text, and most English-speaking initially encounter Shakespeare as a literary creator, the champion example of a distinctive and abiding literary tradition.'[21] Consequently 'it was acknowledged that each year there should be some celebration of the bard, and the audiences arrived in Stratford very much as if they were on a pilgrimage'. [22]

Hall's idea was to provide a more politically aggressive production that aimed at an egalitarian audience, a style of performance not only associated with Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, but fundamentally with Kott's impact. As Sinfield claims, 'modern playwrighting meant the new wave which was challenging the establishment at the Royal Court and Theatre Workshop'.[23] Consequently, State subsidy was highly encouraged, 'to protect innovative work from commercial pressures'. The image of the RSC became radical, following Hall's statement 'I am radical, and I could not work in the theatre if I were not. The theatre must question everything and disturb its audience'.[24] Correspondingly, Brook's approach to theatre and Shakespeare can be described as Modernist, focusing on questions like, 'is there nothing in the revolution that took place in painting fifty years ago that applies to our own crises today? Do we know where we stand in relation to the real and the unreal, the face of the life and its hidden streams, the abstract and the concrete, the story and the ritual?'.[25] In his RSC productions of the 1960's, Brook aimed to recreate 'Shakespeare's meaning for today's audiences'. [26]

Further, 'the company was developing a radical identity which could be seen in every aspect of its existence' and 'where there was no question of theatre promulgating an ideology, it was generally understood that the beliefs and ideas of

the RSC were left of centre'. [27] Sinfield questions the radical identity associated with the RSC and states that it, 'is so well known that it may be taken for granted' and 'is composed of paradoxes and surprises'. [28] As he argues, the theatre productions of the 1960s were subsided by the government, whose authority was being questioned by the very same productions (The chairman of the Arts Council 'questioned whether it was the duty of the state actually to subsidise those who were working to overthrow it'). On the other hand, however, the governmental institutions maintained for support these 'subversive' cultural activities.

Consequently, while RSC productions such as the *The Wars of the Roses* (1963), by Peter Hall and John Barton, and *King Lear* (1962) by Peter Brook were generally considered to have established the radical reputation of the RSC, Sinfield claims this 'imprecision of its radical gesture' was caused by 'culturalism' in which 'the main impetus in English society demanded radicalism and relevance'. [29] (By using the term 'English' society, Sinfield seems to ignore the other cultural minorities of British society and culture, namely Welsh, Scottish and Irish). Sinfield, further claims that some productions, in particular Hall's and Barton's *The Wars of the Roses*, actually reflected a conservative idea. Barton rewrote the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* and made them into three plays, titled *Henry VI, Edward IV* and *Richard III*. The original texts were drastically changed, according to Sinfield, to 'substantiate a particular view of the political relevance of the play'. This interpretation was one of the first to combine 'the traditional authority' and 'urgent contemporaneity'. Hall and Barton were inspired by two apparently contrastive convictions about Shakespeare: one suggested by Tillyard (the traditional authority), and the other one by Kott (urgent contemporaneity). Hall was following Tillyard's

concept of 'an ordered and harmonious society based upon hierarchisation'; and he saw the play as 'humanitarian in its philosophy and modern and liberal in its application'. [30] But Hall also fell under the influence of Kott and was convinced that 'the mechanism of power had not changed in centuries' and 'we also were in the middle of a blood-soaked century' and was convinced 'that a presentation of one of the bloodiest and most hypocritical periods in history would teach many lessons about the present'.[31]

Let us now return the focus on Tillyard and more importantly Kott, whose literary criticism has apparently encouraged the radical image of cultural institutions like the RSC, and in the case of Tillyard, also Cambridge University. How then can these two apparently different/or similar critical positions contribute to the making of a radical image? The following section will examine the concept of Tillyard's traditional authority and Kott's urgent need for contemporarisation.

Tillyard (the traditional authority)

As Graham Holderness argues, the providentialism of Tillyard, which has dominated the British curriculum, GCSE and 'A' level examinations and theatre productions, was circulated in Britain at a mass level for generations.[32] Tillyard's attempt was described as a 'holding action against the Modernist encroachments into academia (New Criticism) [...] a reversion to positivist literary theory'.[33] Tillyard, who after the war dedicated his career to building up the newly established English faculty at Cambridge University, described himself as a 'progressive', attempting to challenge the English Curriculum at Cambridge University.

When Tillyard joined Cambridge University, English studies was still a relatively young academic discipline. Prior to 1880 most teaching of languages and literature occupied a lower cultural status, mainly associated with women, as compared to the upper-class masculine studies in Classics and Mathematics. Hence the most valued subjects were associated with the studying of Latin and Greek. [34] Tillyard obtained his degree in Classical studies and began his academic career as a classical scholar. It was at the beginning of the last century that English studies were gradually recognised as a more independent and modern discipline, offering an educationally significant challenge to the intellectual and cultural hegemony of classical studies. Introducing English into the University curriculum was perceived as an attempt to offer a more liberal education centred on a national identity. As Doyle argues, ''English was being called to sustain a ''national ideal'', which can be traced back to Matthew Arnold''.[35] Hence the role of the educational system, particularly practised by Oxbridge, was to transcend 'individual self-interest' by

subordinating the 'individual self' to 'common aims'.[36] This ideal of an entire integration of the cultural mission of the universities which found its expression in the Newbolt Report of 1921 stressed that

> An education of this kind is the greatest benefit which could be conferred upon any citizen of a great state, and... the common right to it, the common discipline and enjoyment of it, the common possession of the tastes and associations connected with it, would form a new element of national unity, linking together the mental life of all classes by experiences which have hitherto been the privilege of a limited section. [37]

The Newbolt Report also emphasised that the essence of English is to transcend both the historical process and all philosophical systems,

> There is a sense – the most important of all – in which Homer and Dante and Milton, Aeschylus and Shakespeare are all part of the same age or none. Great literature is only partly the reflection of a particular year of generation: it is also a timeless thing, which can never become old-fashioned or out of date, or dependent for its importance upon historical considerations. [38]

This credo presented English culture in terms of a transcendental essence which was inherited within an 'organic' national language and a humanistic literary tradition and it seems to have contributed to the understanding of Tillyard's cultural mission of Shakespeare. The aim was to construct a spiritual unity,

> For if literature be, as we believe.... A fellowship which 'binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it spreads over the whole earth, and over all time', then the nation of which a considerable portion rejects this means of grace, and despises this great spiritual influence, must assuredly be heading for disaster. [39]

Tillyard's effort was an attempt to reconsider the nineteenth century 'historical values' which originated in the Renaissance and were then questioned by

the Modernist dislike for teleological history. In the context of culture and politics of Britain at WWII, at the time of writing of *The Elizabethan World Picture*, Tillyard however, was 'embedded in ideologies of national unity, the muting of social conflict, and the celebration of a kind of jingoism'. [40] Hence Tillyard's reading of *Henry VI*, for example, is a cultural product inscribed in the wartime crisis:

> The School of criticism that furnished [Falstaff] with a tender heart and condemned the Prince for brutality in turning him away was deluded. Its delusions will probably be accounted for, in the later years, through the facts of history. The sense of security created in nineteenth-century England by the predominance of the British navy induced men to rate that very security too cheaply and to exalt the instinct of rebellion above its legitimate station. They forgot the threat of disorder, which was ever present with the Elizabethans. Schooled by recent events we should have no difficulty now in taking Falstaff as the Elizabethans took him. [41]

Tillyard's work was deeply rooted in the ideologies of national unity. For Sinfield, Tillyard's reading of *Henry V* is an example of ideological subversion, which makes us believe that foreign war led to establishing national unity.[42] But in practice, as Dollimore and Sinfield claim, the war presented in *Henry V* was the site of competing interests, material and ideological, and the assumption that the nation must unite against a common foe was shot through with conflict and contradiction. Tillyard's ideology of the Elizabethan World Picture was presented as a teleological design which applied to the universe generally and socially, and was particularly manifested in both as Order and Degree: in addition, 'identity and purpose, were strongly interrelated, with both deriving from the person's place or design'.

In the context of the national curriculum, Tillyard indeed seems one of 'apostles of culture', whose concern was to educate the public mind, disseminating an Arnoldian notion of the 'best' that is known and has been thought. Yet Tillyard

described himself as a 'progressive', who attempted to challenge the English Curriculum at Cambridge University which attracted scholars of different critical orientations. The University was split between 'fairly incompatible traditions including intellectual history and moral thought and the critical study of major works'.[43] It was known as a centre of 'the Eliot-Richards-Leavis modernist and New Critical revolution'.[44] Tillyard 'never joined any coterie, never adopted any extreme or sectarian position, nor turned aside for long into the tempting but dangerous fields of psychology, sociology, or the history of ideas'. [45]

Tillyard strongly believed that the discrepancy in post- war approaches to English originated from the discrepancy between satisfying the professional disciplinary requirements of constituting an adequate knowledge/power and fulfilling an Arnoldian cultural mission. [46] Tillyard took Matthew Arnold's concept of culture as ' a study of perfection', offering 'the best that has been thought and known', for granted. Yet, at the same time, he strongly insisted on 'the classic in preparing men for business and the professions'.[47] Following Arnold, Tillyard reaffirms the universal values associated with man's essential nature; he sees culture as a surrogate theology, which locates human perfection in an internal condition, in the growth and predominance of an entire humanity. [48] Consequently, Tillyard's effort was to balance these two significantly different approaches: the professional disciplinary need for constituting an adequate knowledge/power notion and the Arnoldian cultural mission. Tillyard distanced himself from internal factions within Cambridge University centred around F. R. Leavis, who proposed that English be transformed into the study of culture based on a ' sense of the subtle ways in which, in a concrete cultural situation, the spiritual and material are related' .[49] Leavis saw the pre-war

English methodology as blocking the establishing of English at the core of humanistic studies in a modern university.

Interestingly, both Tillyard and Leavis were strongly Arnoldian and believed in the idea of 'organic unity'. Tillyard saw Shakespeare history plays as an 'organic construct' based on essentialist providentialism. Similarly Leavis believed 'what matters for each age is coherence- significant relatedness in an organic whole, the centre of significance being (inevitably) the present'.[50] Unlike Tillyard , Leavis seemed to have been more alert to the Americanisation of post-war culture and consequently argued for sustaining 'cultural continuity', the cultural heritage. Further, while Tillyard was open to spreading his cultural mission to a vast number of recipients, Leavis believed 'only a minority is capable of advanced intellectual culture', and continued that 'if democratic equality of opportunity requires that standard (at universities) should be lowered then [he] is against such a democracy'.[51]

Tillyard's critical supposition was unquestionably conservative as it provided a fixed and univocal interpretation of Shakespeare, 'vindicating' professional academics like Leavis. Further, Tillyard provides his own 'authoritative' methodology, an exclusive body of knowledge, without which Shakespeare can only be misinterpreted. This can support Sinfield's claim to 'recover the voices and cultures of the repressed and marginalised in history', [52] also clear in Tillyard's vision of Elizabethan history. From a cultural materialist position, Tillyard's approach is 'rooted in the concept of centred structure and determined origin', constituting 'a residual metaphysic within secularist thought', having an ideological

effect; such a cultural formation centred around the primary concern of the meaning of 'true humanism' leads to exclusion and subordination of the other .[53] What Tillyard offers instead is professional training and knowledge of the Elizabethan idea of common practice, or Elizabethan World Picture – the concept purely associated with Western literary tradition.

Tillyard's 'authentic', historically authorised 'truth' and single and univocal interpretation seems essentially conservative. What is more important, however, is why his selective and reductive reading has been so influential. It has been explained that 'the diagnosis of contemporary British-influenced criticism gets at an important part of the case for the British context: Tillyard clearly was so influential because his reading contributed a mythological powerful component of the then current cultural hegemony in war-time and post-war Britain'. [54] This combination of Shakespeare with British nationalism was clearly celebrated in Tillyard's work.

Tillyard's immense popularity with institutions like the RSC was due to the fact that he seemed to have 'combined nineteenth-century methodologies with Modernist aesthetic values'.[55] Tillyard provides a thorough survey of Elizabethan historiography set in the context of the doctrines of order and hierarchy developed in *The Elizabethan World Picture*.

In addition, Tillyard was aware of the cultural gap which separates the Elizabethans from secular post-Victorian generations. He presents a 'historical pattern' as part of a vanished past 'which can be reconstructed through professional reproduction of the text'. [56] Thus, Tillyard encourages us to consider the historical

transformation that we are all democrats and Shakespeare was a monarchist; that we are secular, but Shakespeare was religious and believed in Providence.[57] From a Modernist perspective, Tillyard's notion of Tudor Myth and the Elizabethan World Picture, which formed a basis for a new hegemony for generations, can be associated with some of the aesthetic values characteristic of T.S. Eliot, in particular, Eliot's concern with a lost golden age of organic society.

As Grady claims, Tillyard is consistent throughout his analysis and is strongly convinced about the unified structure of Shakespeare's Histories and, correspondingly, he sees the plays in their Tetralogy Cycles, a kind of 'organic unity', with the Elizabethan world as the lost Golden age. [58] Moreover, Tillyard's emphasis on the literary tradition bears a strong similarity to that of Eliot, who believed that a poet (or rather a critic) has been equipped with a sensitivity representative of his/her own generation and hence can speak for the entire nation. Understandably, Tillyard saw Shakespeare as a medium and carrier of Elizabethan sensitivity and perception. Sinfield's argument about Tillyard's limited interpretation of the hegemonistic practices of the ruling –class ideology, the Tudor Propaganda, seems therefore to have a justification. Dollimore describes critics' role as 'exponents of the new historicism approach to the plays that see their priority' as disclosing 'the effectiveness and complexity of the ideological process of containment in which they presume Shakespeare's drama to be engagement'.[59]

In reference to the RSC, Tillyard strongly believed in an essentially conservative idea, echoing Hall's statement that, 'all Shakespeare's thinking, whether religious, political, or moral, is based on a complete acceptance of this

concept of order. There is a just proportion in all things: man is above beast, king is above man, and God above king'.[60] Moreover, Tillyard like Hall, is convinced of the destructive consequences of violating the state of equilibrium. Similarly Hall, like Tillyard, believes 'revolution, whether in the individual's temperament, in the family, or in the state or the heavens, destroys the order and leads to destructive anarchy'. [61]

Tillyard's primary concern is the 'pattern' of history 'which informs the grand march of the two major historical tetralogies: a universally held and still comprehensible scheme of history: a scheme fundamentally religious, by which events evolve under a law of justice and under the ruling of God's Providence, and of which Elizabeth's England was the acknowledged outcome' .[62] It is a sequence of causes and effects unfolding in time and forming a teleological history, in which order defeats disorder. Tillyard's 'Tudor Myth Pattern' was formulated on the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed's causal narratives, according to which,

> Richard II is wrongfully overthrown by the usurper Henry IV –although Richard himself had helped create the conditions of his own overthrow and deserved some punishment; Henry IV compounds his wrong by ordering Richard's murder, but because he humbles, God postpones his punishment until the reign of his grandson, Henry VI; Henry V, in the meantime, is a glorious king, whose successful reign is a sign of God's ultimate benevolent purposes; but the punishment of Henry IV's crimes comes to fruition in the Yorks. Overthrown of the Lancasterian dynasty, with the malevolent reign of Richard III seen as a temporary triumph of evil finally overcome when Providence leads Henry Tudor to marry the Yorks heir, uniting the two dynasties in the person of Henry VIII and his daughter, Elizabeth. [63]

For Tillyard, 'Shakespeare was more interested in the chain of cause and effect than in the idea that history repeats itself '[64] and behind the apparent clashes of rhetoric

and ideology can be discerned a moral and political lesson teaching the need for order and authority.

Tillyard's critical assumptions and his consequent influence on cultural institutions legitimate, according to Sinfield, 'the dominant social order' or 'status quo' and reflect the existing relations of domination and subordination. Similarly, the working of an ideological pattern can be traced under Elizabethan institutions that all functioned to achieve a 'unity'. Cultural institutions like theatre were under constant state supervision. In a controversial sense, theatre was summoned to perform at Court, as if extending the royal ideology; or when performing elsewhere, the theatre was the mode of cultural production 'in which market forces were strongest, and as such it was especially exposed to the influence of subordinate and emergent classes'.[65]

As Sinfield argues, the principal strategy of ideology is to legitimise inequality and exploitation by representing the social order which perpetuates these things as immutable and unalterable –as decreed by God or simply natural- the law of degree and order inferred from nature further construed as having been put there by God. Seen from this perspective, Tillyard's criticism can be made to illustrate how ideology works.

In a 'classic conservative move', Sinfield continues, 'every possibility which is not the status quo is stigmatised as ''anarchy''- no other idea of order and harmony is admitted'. [66] But another way of deploying the concept of ideology is in

legitimated social order and social relations thought to have the unalterable character of natural law. Hence, Tillyard, like Hall, believes that the hierarchy 'is reinforced by the claim that it is both natural and the concern of a retributive deity: punishment will follow the violation of natural laws. Bolingbroke... and his family suffer retribution for generations'. [67] From the perspective of a Marxist account of ideology, such a practice where violent retribution is projected on to a deity, legitimates authoritative institutions of punishment and shapes 'habits of mind in society'. For Tillyard, this illustrates a perfect example as 'humanitarian in its philosophy and modern and liberal in its application' .[68] For Sinfield this statement reveals Tillyard's purely conservative attitude.

When studying the impact of Tillyard on the RSC, Sinfield claims that Hall's idea of the causal construction of the histories bears strong similarities to that of Tillyard. When writing of Shakespeare's three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, in his *Wars of the Roses*, Hall shows his conservative approach. For example, 'the death of the Bishop of Winchester (2 *Henry VI*, III.iii) was moved to follow the death of Suffolk (IV.i.) and made to conclude the first play. The idea was that Winchester's 'death-bed confession' of responsibility for the death of Gloucester would make 'the main moral point that self-seeking and wickedness breed guilt in the doer, and rejection by other people '.[69] But Winchester does not, in the received text, make such a confession: Hall and Barton added a question from Warwick about it and a response in which Winchester implicitly admits the murder. It further reinforces the concluding scene to 'make Henry guiltily aware that his weakness has been responsible for the death of Gloucester'. [70] For this purpose, as Sinfield argues, King Henry was given a speech made up of three lines from another character in 3 *Henry*

VI, an invented line, and six lines spoken by Henry elsewhere. Thus the scene was 'adjusted in three ways to yield a coherence of event and ideology which, it might be thought, the received text assiduously eschews'.[71] By doing so, Hall clearly endorses the conservative interpretation of the histories.

Having said this, let us now focus on Kott and his 'urgent need for contemporarisation' in a social and cultural context particularly in relation to the RSC.

Kott's urgent need for contemporarisation

Kott's encounter with the Royal Shakespeare Company and English literary circles [72] dates back to the late fifties when he met Peter Brook, in Warsaw. Brook describes the meeting as a beginning of long-term friendship: 'I first met Jan Kott in a night club in Warsaw; it was midnight: he was squashed between a wildly excited group of students: we became friends at once'; 'this quick-witted and combative man was an intellectual, a writer, a journalist, perhaps a Party member. The title ''Professor'' sat ill on him'. [73]. Twenty years later Brook donated an *International Association of Theatre Critics* (IATC) birthday present to Kott to celebrate the publication of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 'the most influential work of Shakespearean criticism of our time'.[74]

The trend to contemporise plays was the second force in Shakespeare performances in Britain, in the 60s, after the open stage movement. Kott, along with Brecht is considered a precursor of this trend, and had provided theoretical support that encouraged the apparently radical experimentation of the RSC. Kott's need for

contemporisation of Shakespeare is, in its cultural materialist aspect, a consequence of cultural and social process; a process that should be understood in its ideological terms. The Second World War brought about the need to rebuild, and apparently change, the pre-war social order.

Kott's critical effort manifested itself in the need to contemporise Shakespeare. In the Polish context, the process seems to be a natural matter - the connections and cultural connotations of 'English Shakespeare' are simply non-applicable in Poland, or any other non-English country. Tillyard was analysing Shakespeare through a 'more' original text. Kott's encounter with Shakespeare was through the medium of Polish, which had resulted in an appropriation of the text not only on a different, more contemporary linguistic level, but also, more importantly, in a different cultural context. Kott encoded Shakespeare through his own cultural and social codes of meaning.

For Kott the concept of contemporarisation concerns a relation between two realms; one on stage and the other off:

> One is the time inhabited by the actors; the other is the time inhabited by the audience,. The relationship between those two times is what finally establishes whether Shakespeare is considered to be a contemporary or not; when two times are closely connected, then Shakespeare is our contemporary. [Contemporary for he was living at the same time, shopped in the same market, shared the same images of the city, folklore, and the carnival] [...] In a deeper meaning there is a double dialectical relationship between the changing times and the changes images of Shakespeare. From Goethe onwards, for the generations which immediately succeeded him, Hamlet was portrayed as a noble soul, too weak to tackle the problems of his time. That was their contemporary vision. [75]

It is important, then, to view Kott's understandings of 'contemporaneity' in the historical literary context. The origin of Polish translations in Poland goes back to the 18th and 19th centuries, and under the Russian/Austrian/Prussian hegemony, when Shakespeare's plays became part of a ''national literature'' and a bourgeois theatre of the ''oppressors''. Hence the first Polish translations of Shakespeare constituted part of the opposition to foreign cultural and political hegemony. Similarly, in post-war Poland the oppositional use of Shakespeare's plays led to their status as ' dissident texts'. Consequently, for ideological reasons, Shakespeare plays like *Richard III* or *Macbeth* were not staged before 1953. After the 'Polish October', the Shakespeare repertoire was extended, yet, the theatre was still under State censorship and subsidy. Hence, in such a situation when cultural products were constantly censored, producers and critics made classics into coded messages about the present, using Shakespeare as a 'secret agent under deep cover', [76] a phenomenon which has been described by Polish cultural historians, like Marta Fik, as Theatre of Allusion.

Before 1980, Polish theatre thrived on allusion, which worked as a channel linking the stage and the audience. On the one hand, through the plays of Shakespeare, the Poles could address political issues, which they were not able to do through the contemporary repertoire. On the other hand, grotesque plays, like *Tango* by Stanislaw Mrozek, were as much about contemporary Poland as about the madness of some non-existent imaginary universe.[77]

Kott encoded in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* hidden messages for the Eastern bloc. For two hundred years, critics had talked of Shakespeare's *universality,*

the interest of his plays for all times and all men, so, by stressing the word *contemporary,* Kott hinted to directors that Shakespeare's plays could comment on current affairs without fear of censorship.

Kott demonstrated that the classics could be used as a metaphorical language to describe the present. *Hamlet,* wrote Kott , 'is like a sponge. Unless produced in a stylised or antiquarian fashion, it immediately absorbs the problems of our time' .[78] The State authorities could not ban Shakespeare without seeming to be philistine. They could try to vet the directors, a difficult task, for directors were not always in control of their actors and certain details of the productions had their subliminal cultural and political implications. The official authorities could bring pressure on theatre critics to give poor reviews to subversive productions, but critics like Kott learnt a double-speak, whereby, in blaming something for not being authentic, they offered reasons why the public should see it.

In its British context, as Sinfield argues, the radical reputation of the RSC, manifested especially in the production of *Wars of the Roses* (1963), did not come from a 'commitment to the propaganda of the Elizabethan State', but from Kott's impact on Hall, who also believed that 'the rhetoric of the plays' characters was really an ironic revelation of the time-honoured practice of politicians'. Hall, who read Shakespeare's History in the context of Kott's essay on 'Kings', also believed that 'the mechanism of power had not changed in centuries. We also were in the middle of a blood-soaked century. I was convinced that a presentation of one of the bloodiest and most hypocritical periods in history would teach many lessons about

the present' .[79] In his essay, Kott argues that twentieth-century history has re-equipped us for the political violence of Shakespeare – consequently, he interprets plays like Richard *III,* in particular, Gloucester's seduction of the Lady Anne through 'the nights of the nazi occupation, concentration camps, mass-murder. One must see in it the cruel time when all moral standards are broken, when the victim becomes the executor, and vice versa'.[80] Kott presents an analogy between Elizabethan political practices and contemporary ones as 'a cruel social order in which the vassals and superiors are in conflict with each other, the kingdom is ruled like a farm, and falls prey to the strongest', [81] but he also offers a kind of enduring human condition, unaffected by political action. For Sinfield, this illustrates Kott's conservatism rooted in his pessimistic revision of the Marxist emphasis on history where 'the implacable roller of history crushes everybody and everything'.[82]

Sinfield, however, does not provide a clear definition of political nihilism/scepticism. Sinfield is convinced that Kott's scepticism about any positive possibilities in politics can be understood in terms of post-war communist Poland. In doing so, Sinfield seems to claim that any scepticism leads to political inertia. In his explanation, Sinfield seems unaware of the political nature of Polish post-war theatre and the use of plays like *Richard III* which attempted to examine the relation between ideology and power. Indeed, Polish audiences, perhaps unlike British ones, were more aware of the workings of dominant ideology seen as a set of beliefs that were generally considered 'true' and 'naturally' given. According to Kott,

> There are two different dissident traditions: the Aryan and the Puritan; and the Central and East European and the Anglo-Saxon. But one element common to both traditions is rejection of state religion and recognition of individual conscience and unfettered intelligence as the last resort which makes it possible to distinguish between the law and legalised illegality, between a just war and rapacious invasion, and between obedience to the law and slavery.

> The most unexpected and thought-provoking feature of the contemporary dissident movement is the revival of long-forgotten, antiquated, almost cottage-industry forms of protest and resistance: samizdat, the chain method of transmitting information, silent picketing, individual hunger strikes, books smuggled across frontiers, open letters signed by a selected group. [...]
>
> In this world, which has been hacked into three different pieces, it has been impossible to silence the quiet voice of the cottage-dissidents. The dissident position has demonstrated not only its moral values but also its political effectiveness. It is one of the few sources of fragile hope that remain. [83]

Kott clearly refers here to his experiences in his native Poland, stressing that as an intellectual he was aware of the political situation. He also expresses his disappointment with communist forms of political organisation, which made him reject his belief in grand ideological systems, but never made him discard hope in the political effectiveness of 'dissident' activities. Kott is a dissident intellectual within the Stalinist regime. Kott 's dissident attitude found its expression in his reading of Shakespeare. It can be argued that Kott's poetics are political and constructively oppositional.

Kott clearly influenced Hall in his production of the *Wars of the Roses* (1963); Hall was convinced that: 'Shakespeare always knew that Man in action is basically an animal. Before Man developed religion or philosophy, he had an instinctive will to dominate. This lust may be executed as self-defence, or the need to obtain food – but it is as basic to an animal as the desire to eat, to sleep or to procreate'.[84] This idea of behaviour pattern, or 'human nature', along with Tillyard's idea of providential order, constitutes, as Sinfield maintains, a most powerfully conservative standpoint. Such an approach siphons 'any residual idealism into deference towards the magnates who perpetrate oppression and reverence for the social system which sustains them'. [85] Yet what Sinfield finds interesting about

Kott's input is Kott's rejection of the concept of *The Elizabethan World Picture.* Kott reads Shakespeare through the victim/executor/victim pattern. For example, in his reading of *Richard III*, Kŏtt describes Richmond as a future victim/executor and he 'suddenly gives a crowing sound like Richard's, and, for a second, the same sort of grimace twists his face. The bars are being lowered. The face of the new king is radiant again'.[86] In this interpretation, Kott questions the providential accession of the king suggested by Tillyard.

Sinfield claims that in their understanding of the play, Hall and Barton 'elaborated upon the received text by writing in a part for the Princess Elizabeth' so as to 'bring out the historical and thematic point that her marriage with Richmond defended the reconciliation of York and Lancaster, and brought the Wars of the Roses to an end '. [87] Therefore, the re-establishment of the 'status quo' seems more significant than ever as the only resounding exception to a universally constant human bestiality.

Kott's other 'radical' effect can be also found, as Sinfield maintains, in a Kott/Brook convergence. Brook's fullest statement of ideas appeared in *The Empty Space* (1968), the book that bears strong similarities to Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964). Brook , like Kott, makes analogies between Elizabethan and contemporary theatres that have both been 'born of violent, vital, pioneering age'; Shakespeare's plays have been 'experimental, popular, revolutionary' and 'were written to be performed continuously, so that their cinematic structure of alternating short scenes, plot intercut with subplot, were all part of a total shape. This shape is only revealed dynamically, that is, in the uninterrupted sequence of these scenes'.[88]

Similarly, in 1958, during a panel discussion with Polish film producers, Kott said, 'Shakespearean text is more similar to a modern film script [...] as the most striking feature of all Shakespeare drama is its amazing tension and intense sequence of events' .[89] Kott like Brook (or perhaps Brook like Kott) intuitively sensed it was film technique that led to a new, more radical form of Shakespeare interpretation. Kott claimed that Shakespeare builds his action from packed scenes, flashes and metaphors; it is an exposition of jealousy, love at first sight, political coup d'etat, death of the tyrant – all these happen incredibly fast. Shakespeare is also very precise, accurate, and gets rid of all unnecessary moments. Every word, Kott further argued, every gesture, has its own significant contribution to the entire play. Similarly to film, an Elizabethan play was obsessed with murder, history and current life. Kott saw the theatre of the 1960s in a period of social change and transformation with its aesthetic, dramatic conventions. Consequently, the new post-war reality demanded a new theatre free of all its nineteenth 'realist' conventions, its stage setting with gigantic decorations - a theatre which would appeal to the imagination.

When discussing radical experimentation within theatre, particularly within the RSC, Sinfield's argument seems to weaken. When Brook formulated his theoretical supposition about 'Rough Theatre', he was convinced that

> When an audience enters a theatre, its imagination is completely open. If ... it finds the curtain up, the stage bare, then the initial anti-pictorial gesture of the production makes it clear that no picture is going to be presented, and that the proscenium is merely an arch over a square of boards on which the actors will seek to create an illusion. Thus in the opening gambit the conventions are established, and the audience's imagination is liberated, leaving it both free and capable of creating its own pictures.[90]

Brook's production of *King Lear* (1962) was an embodiment of his ideas. This play along with *The Wars of the Roses (1963)* contributed to setting the radical character and policy of the company. The production of *King Lear* was a determined realisation of Kott's 'King Lear or Endgame' – an innovative combination of Shakespeare's world and Beckett's vision. Brook was particularly attracted by Kott's non- heroic, existentialist view of the play, offered not 'as a fairy tale of a particularly stubborn story-book king, but as an image of ageing and death, the waning of powers, the slipping away of man's hold on his environment: a great ritual poem on evanescence and morality, on man's loneliness in a storm-tossed universe'.[91] Brook's dislike for the 'outer splendour' of romance, fantasy and imagination was realised in his stage and costume design,

> our frame of reference was always Beckettian. The world of this Lear, like Beckett's, is in a constant of decomposition. The set consists of geometrical sheets of metal, which are ginger with rust and corrosion. The costumes, dominantly leather, have been textured to suggest long and hard wear... Apart from the rust, the leather and the old wood, there is nothing but space –giant white flats opening on to a blank cyclorama.[92]

Kott's conservative ''slant'', as Sinfield would say, derives from Kott's conviction that he recognised in *King Lear* a familiar violence to humanity, an echo of his experience of the horrors of war in Poland, thus placing the King in company with the despairing anti-heroes of Samuel Beckett, Vladimir and Estragon, Hamm and Clove. Kott's approach might indeed be seen as a critical alternative to Tillyard's Elizabethan Mind, yet it does seem to share a similar conviction that there is something like common experience or common sensitivity, considered as fixed and natural; the position which Dollimore describes as essentialist humanism centred

about the idea of some 'essence' and 'Universal' and the demand for a 'transcendental subject'.

Kott's /Brook's Lear at Stratford in 1962 was received with exceptional enthusiasm, as being radical and controversial, challenging the then 'traditional' aesthetic values and previous interpretative slants of the play. If radicalism can be described in terms of change, the 'radical' was promoted by Brook's treatment of Gloucester in the scene of his blinding. Consequently, Kott was criticised by 'traditional' critics for ignoring the play's redemptive moments: 'it easy to present Lear as a tragedy of absurdity and despair if in forty pages you leave out any mention of Cordelia'.[93]

As Sinfield claims, Brook was determined to create a cruel and hostile world for Lear by eliminating 'redemptive moments'. Thus, Brook omitted Cornwall's servants, and by doing so he got rid of a balancing compassion for a Gloucester who had been blinded first with Cornwall's golden spur, then with his fingers ('out vile jelly'). Instead, a cold Brechtian light came up and the audience was given the unforgettable visual image of 'a hunched Gloucester, his eyes just out and a ragged cloth thrown over his head, trying to find his way off the stage among the servants who are clearing the set'.[94] Brook interpreted the play as a 'metaphysical farce about the blindness of man in an environment of savage cruelty'.[95]

As Styan points out, Brook's interpretation 'suffered somewhat from Brook's mistaken urge to see the Fool and Edgar as fully rounded, motivated characters rather than functional role-players'. [96] Consequently, the Fool was 'treated brutally by Lear,

and when the storm broke he chose not to huddle under the King's robes, but crouched apart upstage'.[97]

Sinfield claims that the politics of this approach is nihilist. Brook clearly constructed a play that cannot offer any positive possibilities for humanity. This can be seen in Brook's treatment of the servants who, instead of being compassionate, are rather hostile to the blinded Gloucester, or by ignoring Edmund's final regret, and by introducing as a last gesture a rumbling of thunder, suggesting the storm still to come.

For Sinfield, Brook's attempt was to challenge the complacency of West-End theatre in the 1960 – a challenge associated with his attention to the Theatre of the Absurd which neglects, as Sinfield maintains, as external and trivial the realities of political power and political action. The Absurdist plays 'are conservative, for they tend to deny the relevance of political commitment and, indeed, the significance of the material factors in life with which it is usually concerned'.[98]

Brook's distrust of political relevance collides with Hall's, but in effect Brook's anguished Modernist disdain for history, politics and material reality, and interest in 'channels through which we can come into contact for a limited time with a more intense reality, which heightened perceptions', [99] seems another example of conservatism based on an idea of some universal philosophical system. Again, like Kott, Brook and Hall in their formation of the radical image of the RSC imply a sense of 'general violent destruction, proceeding both from uncontrollable political

system and from mysterious inner compulsions', which amounted to the political stance of the RSC in the 1960s. [100]

Kott's engagement with the Theatre of Absurd, seized on immediately by the RSC, was to present 'the ultimate human condition. [..] where 'the reliability of language is associated through parody, cliché, inconsequentiality, quotation, logic games and undefined menace. Existence is pointless, mysterious, irremediable and therefore anguished'. [101] The politics of Brook's *King Lear,* inspired by Kott, was, according to Sinfield, 'nihilist' and his Lear 'could not be constructed as offering any positive possibilities for humanity by making the servants hostile instead of sympathetic to the blind Gloucester, [...] suggesting the storm still to come' .[102]

Conclusion

Before Kott (and Brecht), Shakespeare criticism of the 20th century was mainly Anglocentric. In this context Kott's approach seemed to have challenged the 'traditional' trend. Firstly, because he came from a foreign Shakespeare school and thus was a unique figure in the predominantly Anglo-centred tradition. Secondly his criticism was enriched with different cultural and political perceptions. While English critics, like Tillyard, had constructed a universal Shakespeare centred on universal values, encouraging the notion of a transcendent humanist Shakespeare, Kott's Shakespeare, on the other hand, was produced in a different cultural and more political environment, encouraging the notion of a politically resistant Shakespeare.

Tillyard stresses Shakespeare's great artistic imagination, showing the vigour and brilliance of his genius. He is more interested in the structural pattern of the

plays and their organic unity. He is concerned with and influenced by the State cultural policy and its effort to use Shakespeare as a 'cultural token', embracing the notion of 'Englishness'. In his reading of Shakespeare, Kott, on the other hand, illustrates the workings of the Grand Mechanism experienced beyond pure artistic form. Kott claims, 'Shakespeare's genius shows itself also in the way he depicts the events occurring at four a.m. [in *Richard III*]. Who has not been awakened in this way at four a.m. at least once in his time'. [103] Kott's Shakespeare characters are faced with 'imposed situations', frequently showing some absurd behaviour. But it is a way of sustaining their sanity in a world that seemed to have lost rationality. Tillyard sees Shakespeare's characters as followers of some common practices, common beliefs, like the providential view of History. Tillyard strongly believes in his own position as an intellectual leader, whose aim is to spread the cultural mission in accordance with the prevailing cultural and state ideology.

Having said this, Sinfield and Dollimore are largely correct in their analyses of Kott's impact on the Royal Shakespeare Company. For Sinfield, Kott's conservative slant derives from the conviction that there exists a sensitivity common to human nature, considered as fixed and natural. Dollimore describes this attitude as a form of essentialist humanism centred around the idea of some 'essence' and of 'universal transcendental values'. Sinfield and Dollimore, however, seem to underestimate Kott's reading of Shakespeare in the context of the Theatre of the Absurd in its Polish version, which, as they claim, provides a nihilist approach not offering any humanitarian values. As Esslin rightly observes, the scenarios of Eastern Theatre of the Absurd were significantly different from their Western equivalent. While in Western tradition, according to Esslin, the Theatre of the

Absurd was 'the antithesis of the political theatre' and 'oblivious of social problems and their remedies', in its Eastern version, it was an essentially 'vigorous and barbed kind of political theatre'.[104]

The final chapter will further examine Kott's reading of the play and its apparent nihilist nature. It will argue against Dollimore and Sinfield, showing that Kott's poetics are political and constructively oppositional. Looking at the application of Kolakowski's Priest/Jester metaphor, and concept of the carnival as seen by Mikhail Bakhtin, the chapter will view Kott 's reading of *King Lear* as being subversive and political. Both Kott and Bakhtin can be seen as dissident intellectuals within Soviet regimes. Additionally, the chapter will use Bakhtin as a way of reviewing Kott's political radicalism. The chapter will attempt to show how Kott's work was implicitly Bakhtinian before Kott referred explicitly to Bakhtin in his later work. Finally, it will also revise Sinfield's understanding of nihilism.

Endnotes

[1]E.M.W. Tillyard , *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944, London: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 13.

[2] E.M.W. Tillyard, *Elizabethan World Picture* (1943, London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p.102.

[3] Carl Tighe, *The Politics of Literature: Poland 1945-1989* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p.149.

[4] Alan Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare: Theatre and Making of Ideology', *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 162.

[5] Alan Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare: Theatre and Making of Ideology', p. 162.

[6] Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 162.

[7] Sinfield, *ibid.*, p. 178.

[8] Dollimore and Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare,* p. 131.

[9] Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 162.

[10] Sinfield, *ibid.*, p. 178.

[11] Sinfield, *ibid,*, p. 164.

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[13] Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 164.

[14] Sinfield, *ibid.*, p. 166.

[15] Sinfield, *ibid.*, p. 166.

[16] Sinfield, *ibid.*, p. 167.

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[18] Sinfield, *ibid.*, p. 174.

[19] Ralph Berry , *On Directing Shakespeare: interviews with contemporary directors* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p.117.

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[21] Dennis Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. i.

[22] Trevor Nunn, in Berry's *On Directing Shakespeare*, p.56.

[23] Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 159.

[24] David Addenbrooke, *The Royal Shakespeare Company* (London: Kimber, 1974), p.66.

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[28] Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 159.

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[32] Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 198.

[33] Hugh Grady, 'The Case of E.M.W. Tillyard', *The Modernist Shakespeare (* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.161.

[34] Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.2

[35] Doyle, *ibid.*, p. 27.

[36] Doyle, *ibid.*, p. 27.

[37] Doyle, *ibid.*, p. 49.

[38] Doyle, *ibid.*, p. 58.

[39]. Doyle, *ibid.*, p. 61.

[40] Grady, 'The Case of E.M.W. Tillyard', p. 165.

[41] Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 291.

[42] Sinfield and Dollimore, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 215.

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[45] Roberts, F., ed. *Obituaries from the Times 1961-1970* (Reading: Newspaper Archive Development, 1975), p. 789.

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[50] Leavis, F. R. , *English Literature in Our Time and The University* (London : Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 8.

[51] G. Singh, ed., *F.R.Leavis: the Critic as Anti-Philosopher* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 162.

[52] Dollimore and Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 214.

[53] J. Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, (Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd, 1984), p.44.

[54] Grady, ''The Case of E.M.W. Tillyard', p. 166.

[55] Grady, *ibid.*, p. 171.

[56] Grady, *ibid.*, p. 174.

[57] Grady, *ibid.*, pp. 174-5.

[58] Grady, *ibid.*, p. 178.

[59] Dollimore, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 15.

[60] Barton and Hall, *The Wars of the Roses*, p.x.

[61] Barton and Hall, *The Wars of the Roses*, p. x.

[62] Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, pp. 320-21.

[63] Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* , pp. 59-61.

[64] Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* , p. 155.

[65] Sinfield and Dollimore, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 211.

[66] Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 160.

[67] Hall, *The Wars of the Roses*, p.x.

[68] Hall, *ibid.*, p.x.

[69] Hall, *ibid.*, p.xix.

[70] Hall, *ibid.*, p.xix.

[71] Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 161.

[72] One of the earliest accounts of Kott's criticism available to English-speaking readers appeared in the *Shakespeare Survey*. In 1963, Stanislaw Helsztynski, a Polish correspondent, wrote about Kott: 'Jan Kott, professor of Comparative Literature at Warsaw University published a book *Szkice o Szekspirze* (Essays on Shakespeare) well known as widely read connoisseur of modern West European drama and theatre, the author analyses the meaning of political power in Shakespeare's history plays [...] In two important chapters dealing with *King Lear* and *The Tempest* new hints of a fresh theatrical approach are presented from the point of view of the 20th century'.

In his autobiography, Kott attributes his international fame to Adam Bromberg, the director of PWN, a Scientific State Publishing House, who suggested the English version of the book: 'This was a year after the polish edition came out [1961]. His idea seemed to me even more foolish that unexpected, but Bromberg commissioned the English translation by Boleslaw Taborski and paid for it in hard currency. He had not only the imagination of a great editor, but also the business sense' (Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 43.)

For Boleslaw Taborski, the English translator of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 'this first extensive translation was a pleasant task of rendering the author's characteristic light style, based on short sentences through which he developed his arguments. One of the first reviews defined it with some distaste as unpleasant staccato sentences' (private correspondence with Taborski, dated 18 Dec 1999).

[73] Brook, 'Preface to *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*', p.i.

[74] John Elsom, ed., *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p 8.

[75] Elsom, *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary,* pp. 13-14.

[76] Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare*, p.iv.

[77] Andrzej Zurowski, 'Polish Theatre in the New Epoch', *NTQ* (1991), 27: 286-289.

[78] Jan Kott, *SOC*, p. 52.

[79] Hall, *Wars of the Roses*, p.xi.

[80] Kott, *SOC*, p. 37.

[81] Kott, *SOC*, p. 25.

[82] Kott, *SOC, p.* 39.

[83] Adam Michnik, 'Gogol's Venom: A Study of illusions', *Partisan Review*, 3 (2000), vol LXVII, No 3 after http/www.bu.edu/partisanreview/archive/2000/3/michnik.html accessed on 05/12/2001, p.14.

[84] Hall, *Wars of the Roses*, p.xii.

[85] Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 162.

[86] Kott, *SOC, p.* 46.

[87] Hall, *The Wars of the Roses*, p.xxii.

[88] Peter Brook, *Empty Space* (Harmondsworth: Penquin, 1972), p.78.

[89] Jan Kott, et al, 'Rozmowy o dramacie: Szekspir I film', *Dialog* 9 (1958), 177-122.

[90] Peter Brook, *Style in Shakespearean Production,* pp. 252-3

[91] Martin Esslin, 'Preface' to *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p.xxi.

[92] Charles Markowitz and Simon Trussler, eds., *Theatre at Work* (London: Methuen, 1967), p.134.

[93] 'Shakespeare in Britain', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XIV, 1963, 421.

[94] Bamber Gascoigne, *The Spectator*, 16 Nov (1962), 758.

[95] Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution*, p. 218.

[96] Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution*, p. 221.

[97] Styan, *ibid.*, p. 221.

[98] Alan Sinfield, 'The Theatre and its audiences', *The Context of English Literature: Society and Literature 1945-1970* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 183.

[99] Berry , *On Directing Shakespeare*, p. 129.

[100] Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 164.

[101] Sinfield, *The Theatre and its Audiences*, p. 183.

[102] Sinfiled, 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 163.

[103] Kott, *SOC*, p. 23.

[104] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, (London: Penquin Books, 1980), p. 316.

Chapter Four

'The History of the world can do without psychology and with rhetoric. It is just action': Kott's reading of *King Lear*

Introduction

In this final chapter I want to argue that Kott's existentialist approach to Shakespeare does not necessarily lead to hostility to positive action and the total resignation embodied in the scenarios of the Theatre of the Absurd. As Esslin points out, 'the scenarios of Eastern theatre were different from the British theatre, showing much involvement in politics', while Czerwinski argues that Kott's criticism emphasises meanings beyond the obvious to 'a despair which does not mean resignation'.[1] One of the ways in which Kott can be perceived as a radical thinker, unlike Tillyard, was his involvement in existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd. It was precisely the Theatre of the Absurd that provided assistance to Kott in his struggle against socialist realism and the dominant totalitarian dictatorship. Kott's vision of theatre, particularly Shakespearean theatre, serves as a vehicle for expressing modern problems.

According to Sinfield, the Theatre of the Absurd neglects as external and trivial the realities of political power and political action. He describes the Absurdist plays as conservative, 'for they tend to deny the relevance of political commitment and indeed the significance of the material factors in life'. [2] In other words, with its rejection of existing order, the Theatre of the Absurd leaves no scope for intervention, subversion, negotiation or analysis of specific historical processes.

There are, however, inconsistencies in Dollimore and Sinfield's criticism of Kott. Sinfield, for example, claims that Kott was actually contributing to the making of the radical image of the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1960s while also arguing that Kott's Shakespeare theatres were fundamentally conservative. Sinfield

also argues that Kott at least 'initially channelled a certain radical impetus and his criticism was certainly more political than the main Western academic tradition'. [3] Sinfield also claims that the radical image of the RSC 'narrowed the scope of political action and impeded appreciation of the political potential of subordinate classes helping to construct a dissident intelligentsia'.[4] However, neither Sinfield nor Dollimore provide a clear definition of political nihilism and scepticism. On the one hand, Sinfield speaks of the 'dissident intelligentsia' and on the other, a left liberal intelligentsia which was influenced by the RSC significantly by Kott, and their 'great deal of genuine radical purpose'.

Dollimore and Sinfield embrace the theory of political and social context for understanding history and the construct of the human subject in terms of socio-political processes but while they regard Kott and Tillyard's works as cultural documents, they refuse to recognise that they are produced as a result of specific political and cultural conditions. This is particularly true about Kott's cultural and political context. It is important to view Kott's understanding of contemporaneity in its historical literary context. Shakespeare's plays were used to convey hidden messages about the present and similarly Kott reads Shakespeare through the medium of Polish cultural and social codes of meaning.

Consequently plays like *Hamlet* have become tools against forms of repression, a perfect material to practise 'double thinking' particularly in the times when artistic or individual freedom is endangered. In the Cold War period, as Czeslaw Milosz argues, 'historical experience enabled everybody to identify himself with Hamlet, who now, contrary to psychological interpretations, was just a brave

young man forced to play the Fool in order to deceive a dangerous master and his plainclothes men. Thus Shakespeare was integrated into the traditional Polish concept of the theatre as a public forum where problems of the community are debated by means of an artistic transposition'. [5] Milosz further argues that 'Kott formulated all this more cogently than any of his Polish colleagues, and to the scholarly objections raised by some Western professors he might oppose a valid argument: his Shakespeare has an immediacy that all Western directors, if not all Western professors, might well envy'. [6] However, Kott was not innovative in this, as his understanding of Shakespeare grew out not only from the opposition to Soviet cultural policies practised in the pre-war and immediate post-war period, but also from the general Polish cultural and literary heritage.

Having outlined the key argument, the following chapter will further discuss Dollimore and Sinfield's criticism of Kott's apparent nihilistic vision of Shakespeare by examining Kott's understanding of King Lear in the context of Kolakowski's philosophy of Jester/priest. Kolakowski's ideas led to theoretical basis for Kott's concept of the Theatre of the Absurd. I want to argue that Kott's nihilism/absurdism and his interest in Kolakowski's Jester/priest dichotomy are essentially dialogical ideas, embodying a carnivalesque anti-authoritarian politics which Dollimore and Sinfield seem to ignore. To support my argument I will look at some of the theoretical suppositions of Mikhail Bahktin, particularly his concepts of carnival and the grotesque. The chapter will establish some similarities between Kott's and Bakhtin's political and oppositional use of poetics. The chapter attempts to apply some of Bakhtin's carnivalesque tradition in Kott's reading of Shakespeare. Finally I will argue that Kott's work was Bakhtinian before the publication of *The Bottom*

Translation: Marlowe and Shakespeare and the Carnival Tradition (1987), which can be seen in Kott's understanding of Kolakowski and the absurd.

Kott and Bakhtin on the carnivalesque tradition

It is crucial to view Kott's reading of Shakespeare in the context of Bakhtin's concept of the carnival and the grotesque. Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), whose major critical thought centred around the questions of signification in social life in general and artistic creation in particular, significantly influenced Kott in his approach to Shakespeare. Bakhtin's concept of carnival 'opposes all that is Stalinist; the dialogical voices of the unofficial culture in the people resisted the theological monologism of the Catholic church (and tyrannical communism); the grotesque body was celebrated not condemned as sinful (or sanitised by canons of Soviet Realism)...collective laughter in broad daylight defeats eschatological terror (and laughter as sinful)'. [7]

If we examine the intellectual formation of Kott and Bakhtin, we can see some common features. Both Kott and Bakhtin experienced Stalinist regimes and were very aware of Marxist theories and doctrines. Both were dissident intellectuals who were in political conflict with the establishment - Bakhtin was sentenced to ten years on the Solovetskii Islands which was later commuted to six years exile in Kazakhstan. Both Bakhtin and Kott faced a dilemma between artistic freedom and the state insistence on socialism realism. Kott shares with Bakhtin his Marxist interest in the historical and social world and both were also interested in the formation of the subject and in language as the means by which ideologies get articulated.

Kott was particularly inspired by Bakhtin's idea that linguistic production, and any classical literary text, is essentially dialogic, formed in the process of social interaction, resulting in the iteration of different social values being registered in terms of reaccentuation of the speech of others. As Bakhtin argues,

> Languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each of which in its own way reflects a little piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us to guess at and grasp behind their inter-reflecting aspects for a world that is broader, more multileveled and multi-horizoned than would be available to one language, one mirror. [8]

As Bakhtin further argues, while the ruling stratum provides a single discourse as exemplary, the subordinate classes are inclined to subvert this monologic closure. Following Bakhtin's idea that a classical text should be 'translated' into a particular social and cultural code, Kott believes,

> For an interpreter a 'text' does not exist independently of its readings. Great texts, and perhaps even more so quotations from classical texts, literal or parodystic, form, together with their readings, a literary and cultural tradition. The classical texts are constantly rewritten [...] classical texts and quotations continually repeated are active in intellectual emanation, which gives them new meanings and changes old ones. The emanation is the history of the classical text as well as the history hidden in the literary text. [9]

By looking at the way in which medieval modes of living and working collectively with accordance to the rhythms of nature re –emerge in the forms of popular culture opposed to the official culture, Bakhtin focuses on the collapse of strict hierarchical pattern in the medieval age and the beginnings of the modern era. In his *Problems of Dostoyewski* (1929), Bakhtin formulates his thought,

> It can be said [...] that a person of the Middle Ages lived, as it were, two lives: one that was the official life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjected to strict hierarchical order, full of terror, dogmatism, reverence and piety; the other was the life of the carnival square, free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything. Both these lives were legitimate but separated by strict temporal boundaries. [10]

For Bakhtin the activities of the carnival square - the collective ridicule of the establishment, inversion of hierarchical system, violation of decorum, celebration of bodily excess, disregard for any absolutes - constitute an implicit popular concept of the world. This conception can be ideologically developed until the radical laughter of the Carnival Square enters into 'the world of great literature' like Rabelais. Bakhtin views the novel as the epitome of a historical process of abolishing the medieval hierarchical order and a birth of the modern era. Rabelais' work embodies a new philosophy of history, in which the world can be seen in the process of becoming. The grotesque is the image of this becoming in which the individual body is transcended and the biological body is negated with the body of historical progressing mankind.[11]

In his essay on 'The Bottom Translation', originally published in 1979, and later part of the essays collected in *The Bottom Translation: Marlowe and Shakespeare: Carnivalesque Tradition,* published in 1987, Kott examines *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through Bakhtin's idea of *serio ludere*,

> The carnival attitude possesses an indestructible vivacity and the mighty, life-giving power to transform... or the first time in ancient literature the object of a serious (though at the same time comical) representation is presented without epical or tragical distance, presented not in the absolute past of myth and legend, but on the contemporary level, in direct and even crudely familiar contact with the living contemporaries. In these genres

> mythical heroes and historical figures out of the past are deliberately and emphatically contemporised...
>
> The serio-comical genres are not based on legend and do not elucidate themselves by means of the legends – they are consciously based on experience and on free imagination; their relationship to legend in most cases deeply critical, and at times bears the cynical nature of the expose... They reject stylistic unity... For them multiplicity of tone in a story and a mixture of the high and low, the serious and the comic, are typical: they made use ...of parodically reconstructed quotations. In some of these genres the mixture of prose and poetic speech is observed, living dialects and slang are introduced, and various authorial masks appear. [12]

Kott reads *Midsummer Night's Dream* through two different texts: St Paul's' 'First Letter to Corinthians', and *The Golden Ass*, which were generally known in the Renaissance. As Kott argues, 'from the early sixteenth century until the late seventeenth century, both texts were read in two largely separate intellectual traditions. Having two discrete circuits and interpreted in two codes, which were complementary but contradictory. The first of these codes, which is simultaneously a tradition, a system of interpretation, and a ''language'', can be called Neoplatonic or hermetic. The second code is the code of the carnival' or in Bakhtin's terms the tradition of *serio ludere*. [13]

Kott explicitly refers to Bakhtin, who shows convincingly, in Kott's opinion, that in carnival wisdom can be found the essence of life and its continuity. Kott argues, 'from Saturnalia through the medieval and Renaissance carnivals and celebrations, the elevated and noble attributes of the human mind are exchanged – as Bakhtin shows convincingly - for the bodily functions [...] in carnival wisdom they are the essence of life: a guarantee of its continuity' .[14] Kott, like Bakhtin, believes that

during medieval ludi, the figure of the ass is 'the gospel –symbol of debasement and humility. But only then vulgar parodies of liturgy were allowed'. [15] Kott argues the mask of the ass is most polysemic of all festival masques of animals, 'the icon of an ass, for Bakhtin 'most ancient and lasting symbol of the material bodily lower stratum', is the ritualist and carnivalesque mediator between heaven and earth, which transforms the ''top'' into the "bottom"'.[16] Since the figura and the masque of the ass is a common ground for the bodily and the spiritual, Kott believes 'that is why the spiritual mating of Bottom and the Queen of the Fairies, which culminates in the night and forest revelry, is so ambivalent and rich in meanings'. [17] 'The encounter of Titania and Bottom, the ass and the mock king of the carnival is [for Kott] the very beginning of modern comedy'. Kott also argues that,

> The lunatics – the Fool, the Lord of Misrule, the Abbot of Unreason – know well that when a true king, as well as the carnival mock-king is thrown off, he is turned into a thing "base and vile, holding no quantity" [...] and that Dianas, Psyches and Titanias sleep not with winged Cupids but with an ass.[...] The bottom translation is the wisdom of Folly and the delight of the Fool.[18]

This represents the key notion of the Saturnalia and the carnival, that everything must be inverted. What was once pure and civilised becomes 'base and vile' as in Ancient Rome with the origins of the festival where the slaves become the masters for some time and inevitably reduced the household to drunken orgies. Titania, the Queen of the Fairies falls in love/sex with Bottom, a 'low' human made lower by his appearance of an ass. Similarly, in *King Lear* as we shall see, Kott examines the relationship of a King (the highest of the order – Kott's 'true king') and a Fool (the lowest – the 'mock-king'). But there is an insignificant difference between them. When the King falls, he becomes something lower than the Fool,

something 'holding no quantity' and their relationship, however improbable, becomes the most trusting of the play.

Tragedy and the Grotesque

Kott argues that tragedy and grotesque share similar elements. In both a tragic and grotesque world, 'situations are imposed, compulsory and inescapable in which both the tragic hero and the grotesque actor must lose their struggle against the absolute'. [19] However, the 'downfall of the tragic hero is a confirmation and recognition of the absolute; whether the downfall of the grotesque actor means a mockery of the absolute and its desecration' and 'the absolute is transformed into a blind mechanism [...], mockery is directed not only at the tormentor but also at the victim.' [20]

As Kott argues, in the tragic world this compulsory situation has been imposed in turn by various forces that have been endowed with reason and inevitability. In the world of the grotesque, however, the 'downfall cannot be justified by, or blamed on, the absolute'. The absolute, Kott claims, is 'stronger' than the 'absurd'. Also, this absurd mechanism as Kott calls it, is not 'transcendental in relation to man or at any rate to mankind. It is a trap set by man himself into which he has fallen'. [21] By dividing his kingdom between Goneril, Regan and Cordelia, King Lear fell into his own trap. Only when King Lear or Gloucester consciously recognise the necessity, the imposed situations, can they be free,

> Man must be defeated and cannot escape from the situation that has been imposed on him. All he can do is to give up; refuse to play the blindman's buff. Only by the possibility of refusal can he surmount the external forces'. [22]

Kott's concept of 'defeat' echoes Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque and degradation. 'To degrade' as Bakhtin claims, 'is to bury to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive negative aspect but also a regenerating one. To degrade one object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of non-existence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving'. [23]

Both Gloucester and Lear became degraded of their social positions. Gloucester's suicidal attempt will be seen as the lowest point of his degradation, reaching the very bottom in order to be born again as a new individual who has achieved his self awareness and freedom that 'is only the conscious recognition of necessity'.[24] According to Kott, 'all the characters must be uprooted from their social positions and pulled down, to final degradation. They must reach ''rock-bottom''. The downfall is not merely a philosophical parable, as Gloucester's leap [over the supposed precipice is]. The theme of downfall [...] is at the same time physical and spiritual, bodily and social'. [25] Moreover, 'a downfall means suffering and torment. It may be a physical or spiritual torment, or both. Lear will lose his wits; Kent will be put in stocks; Gloucester will have his eyes gouged out and will attempt suicide.' [26] But as Kott further claims, 'for a man to become naked [...] it is not enough to deprive him of his name, social position and character. One must [...] turn him, like King Lear, into a ruin'd piece of nature.' For Kott, this 'ruin'd piece of

nature' is a process of degradation from which something more and better might emerge. [27]

Kott also argues that 'Gloucester's suicide attempt, too is merely a circus somersault on an empty stage. Gloucester and Edgar's situation is tragic, but as it has been shown in pantomime, the classic expression of buffoonery'.[28] Gloucester's desperate address,

> O you mighty gods,
> This world I do renounce and in your sights
> Shake patiently my great affliction off
> If I could bear it longer and not fall
> To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
> My snuff and loathed part of nature should
> Burn itself out. (IV. vi. 6.34-40)

This is obviously a form of protest against undeserved suffering and the world's injustice. Gloucester's speech refers to eschatology. Supposing the gods are cruel, as Kott points out, they must take this suicide into some kind of consideration. Gloucester's suicide attempt only makes sense in its reference to the absolute. However, if there are no gods, and their 'moral order in the world does not exist', this attempt does not offer any alternative. It is a surrender, which can be seen as a form of nihilism in terms of reflection of positive values and the belief in nothingness.

It is crucial, however, to understand the difference between passive 'social' and political 'nihilism'. It can be argued that the difference originates from the fact that one accepts 'whatever happens within futility and pointlessness while the other destroys/creates meaning and value'. As John Barrow claims, 'there is no reason to

suspend belief in an underlying reality. It's just that the steps we take to establish it determine what it will be found to be'. [29] If nihilism can be seen as an organic logical response to artificial chaos, the intentional chaos manufactured by various ideologies, the social frames, then Gloucester's suicidal attempt seems also grotesque. Kott's response to this emphasises meaningless and pointless action; 'death exists to be a protest. It is surrender. It becomes the acceptance of the world's greatest cruelty: death'. [30] Gloucester finally understands his position and his degradation brings about affirmation of life, rather than total resignation.

Kott's placing tragic figures like Gloucester or King Lear in the world of the grotesque is his response to the artificial chaos intentionally manufactured by external conditions like ideologies realised by state apparatuses or religious doctrines. Kott argues that the 'dispute about the tragic and grotesque interpretations of human fate reflect the everlasting conflict of two philosophies [...] of two opposing attitudes defined by the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski as the irreconcilable antagonism between the priest and the Fool. Between tragedy and the grotesque there is the same conflict for or against such notions as eschatology, belief in the absolute, hope for the ultimate solution of the contradiction between the moral order and everyday practice. Tragedy is the theatre of the priest, grotesque is the theatre of clowns'. [31] Kott further argues that 'when established values have been overthrown and there is no appeal to God, Nature or History [...] the clown becomes the centre figure in the theatre'. [32] Kott's understanding of the clown/Jester's position in the social frame has been significantly influenced by Kolakowski's definition of the Jester according to which,

> The Jester is he who moves in good society without belonging to it, and treats it with impertinence; he who doubts all that appears self-evident. He could not do this if he belonged to good society; he would then be at best a salon scandalmonger. The Jester must stand outside good society and observe it from the sidelines in order to unveil the non obvious behind the obvious, the non final behind the final; yet he must frequent society so as to know what it holds sacred and to have the opportunity to address it impertinently... In every era the Jester's philosophy exposes as doubtful what seems most unshakeable, reveals the contradictions in what appears obvious and incontrovertible, derides common sense and reads sense into the absurd. [33]

Kolakowski's philosophy of Jester/priest echoes Bakhtin's idea of carnival, both seemingly subversive in their application:

> The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary...life are suspended during carnival; what is suspended first of all is the hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety and etiquette connected with it – that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. This is very important aspect of the carnival sense of the world. People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contacts on the Carnival Square. The category of familiar contact is also responsible for the special way mass actions are organised, and for free carnival gesticulations and for the outspoken carnivalistic word. Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous half-real and half-play acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterpoised to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of non-carnival life. The behaviour, gesture and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in non-carnival life and thus from the vantage point of non carnival life become eccentric and inappropriate. Eccentricity is a special category of the carnival sense of the world organically connected with the category of familiar contact; it permits – in concretely sensual form – the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves. [34]

When discussing Kott's reading of Shakespeare, particularly *King Lear*, it can be refreshing to view his understanding through Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque and of carnival. As Bakhtin argues, the collective ridicule of the official system and the inversion of hierarchy could not become ideologically elaborated until the radical laughter of the square entered into the 'world of great literature'. [35]

The grotesque or carnival, for Bakhtin, 'discloses the potential of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life. It leads man out of the confines of the apparent (false) unity, of the indisputable and stable' [36] [...] The grotesque is the image of the body, as an image, which reveals incomplete metamorphoses no longer, represents itself. In another way, the grotesque, in Bakhtin's understanding, can be seen as a set of image-born strategies for destabilising the official worldview.

The Philosophy of the Fool

Kott's treatment of the Fool is a crucial element in refuting Dollimore and Sinfield's accusation of Kott's nihilistic version of Shakespeare. To accept the role of a 'Fool' or a Jester is very ambiguous and it abounds in internal contradictions arising from the discrepancy between profession and philosophy. As Kott claims, 'The profession of a Jester, like that of an intellectual, consists in providing entertainment, this philosophy demands of him that he tell the truth and abolish myths'.[37] A humanist and renaissance view of folly places Shakespearean Fools with no possibility of intervention in the plot but with a power of satirical and utopian prophecy:

> Fools can provide the very thing a prince is looking for, jokes, laughter and fun. And let me tell you, Fools have a gift which is not to be despised. They're the only ones who speak frankly and tell the truth, and what is more, passionately the truth...The fact is kings do dislike the truth but the outcome of this is extraordinary for any Fool. They can speak truth and even open insults and be heard with positive pleasure. Indeed, the words which would cost a wise man his life are surprisingly enjoyable when uttered by a clown. [38]

In general criticism, Shakespeare's Fools are given no possibility of intervention in the plot but have powers of satirical and utopian prophecy. Erasmus'

Fool is not sufficient to stop the events from destroying the hero. Kott's idea of the Fool becomes the general form of criticism of the society. Kott's Jester is capable of keeping a distance and his role is not limited to pure entertainment or just satirical jokes. In this, Kott is close to Michel Foucault's idea of the Fool.

> The denunciation of madness (la folie) becomes the general form of criticism. In farces and soties, the character of the madman, the Fool or the simpleton assumes more and more importance...he stands centre stage as the guardian of the truth...the folly leads each man into a blindness where he is lost, the madman on the contrary reminds each man of his truth: in a comedy where each man deceives the other and dupes himself the madman is comedy to the second degree: the deception of deception; he utters in his simpleton's language which makes no show of reason, the words of reason that release in the comic, the comedy.... [39]

The world of the grotesque in *King Lear* bears a strong similarity to the world of tragedy in *Hamlet*. For Hamlet, the denunciation of madness becomes a philosophy: the general form of criticism. Kott's Fools, like those of Foucault, stand centre stage as the guardians of truth reminding each man of his truth. The Fool utters in 'his simpleton's language which makes no show of reason, the words of reason that release in the comic, the comedy...'. [40] Unlike Lear, Gloucester, Kent, Albany and Edmund, the Fool's language abounds in biblical travesties and inverted medieval parables. It is 'a splendid baroque surrealist expression [with] sudden leaps of imagination [...] the Fool uses dialectics, paradox and the absurd kind of humour'. [41]

Having adopted his position, the King will adopt the Fool's discourse. The role of the Jester has been accomplished, he disappears by the end of Act III having said his last words: 'And I'll go to bed at noon...' In the scene with Gloucester, Lear looks at the world in the same way as the Fool, 'They told me I was everything. This a lie – I am not ague-proof" Having graduated from the school of clownish

philosophy, Lear understands that the 'History of the world can do without psychology and with rhetoric. It is just action'.[42]

The Harlequin, is for Kott, an original clown as a 'servant who really does not serve anybody and jockeys everybody away. He jeers at merchants and lovers, at marquises and soldiers. He makes fun of love and ambition, of power and money. He is wiser than his masters, although he seems only to be more clever. He is independent because he has realised that the world is simply a folly' [43]. Puck from a *Midsummer Night's Dream* is a 'Harlequin' who ' pulls all the characters on strings. He liberates instincts and puts the mechanism of this world in motion. He puts it in motion and mocks it at the same time'. [44] His buffoonery is at the same time a philosophy and a profession. Similarly, Bottom seems to refer back to the Fool's attire where he calls, 'Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Me thought I was – there is no man can tell what. Me thought I was – and- me thought I had – but man is a patched Fool if he will offer to say what me thought I had'. (IV.i.205-8) Clowns wear Jesters' attire and serve the master but they have not ceased to be harlequins. The position of a Jester causes a dilemma between his professionalism and philosophy. The role of the Jester provides entertainment but at the same time his philosophy demands he tell the truth. The Fool in *King Lear* is the first who becomes aware of his position.

Fool
Prithee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy Fool to lie.
I would fain learn to lie.
King Lear
An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipp'd.
Fool
I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are. They'll have me whipp'd for speaking true; thou'st have me whipp'd for lying and sometime I am

> whipp'd for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind of thing than a Fool; and yet I would not be thee, nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides and left nothing in the middle.
>
> (I. iv. 172-181)

The Fool also realises the King's foolish decision:

> For when thou gavst them the rod and puttest down thine own breeches,
> Then they for sudden joy did weep
> And I for sorrow sung
> That such a king should play bo-peep
> And go the Fool among. (I. iv. 165-170)

Kott claims 'a Fool who has recognised himself a Fool, who has accepted the fact that he is only a Jester in the service of the prince ceases, to be a clown' [45] and with all confidence can say 'I am a Fool, thou art nothing' (I.4. 184-185). The clown's philosophy requires that he treat everybody as a Fool, the greatest one being 'the one who doesn't know he is a Fool', the King himself. By doing so, the Fool becomes a subject of alienation: he is aware of his social status but cannot accept alienation; only when he rejects it does he becomes aware of it. Kott compares the position of Jester to that of bastard. As Kott points out, 'the bastard is a bastard for as long as he accepts his bastard's position and regards it as inevitable. The bastard ceases to be a bastard when he does not consider himself a bastard any more. But at this point the bastard must abolish the division into bastards and legitimate offspring'. [46]

By abolishing the divisions, which are described by the social and moral order, the Jester 'enters into opposition against the foundations of social order or at least exposes them'. [47] Moreover, 'A Jester is looking from the outside and does not follow any ideology. He rejects all appearances of law, justice, moral order [...] he

has no illusions and does not seek consolation in the existence of natural or supernatural order which provides for the punishment of evil and reward of good'. [48]

A similar element of opposition to pre-established forms of repression and control exists in Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque to which Kott frequently refers when describing Bottom/Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* As Wiles argues, 'It is in the figure of Bottom the clown, the lower-class male locked in the arms of a queen, that we must seek the elusive Bakhtinian grotesque [...] Bottom is part of a company of players. These plays are a metaphor of Shakespeare's own company who by performing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at a wedding, intruded upon an elite gathering to which they would not normally have been admitted'. [49] Wiles further claims, Bakhtin's theory of carnival 'considerably plays down the Erasman tradition of learned wit as part of Renaissance humanist culture'. [50] Kott strongly believes in *King Lear* as a philosophy, a 'conscious crossing over to the position of the Fool...' Again Kott refers to Kolakowski's idea of a Jester who 'exposes as doubtful what seems most unshakeable, reveals the contradictions in what appears obvious and incontrovertible, derides common sense and reads sense into the absurd'. [51] The Fool deprives majesty and its sacredness in a similar way: 'in historical dramas, royal majesty is deprived of its sacredness by a stab of dagger or by the burial tearing off the crown from a living King's head.'[52] The Fool accompanies Lear 'on the cold night of madness'. Similarly Edgar takes the blind Gloucester through a grotesque suicide. The Fool 'does not desert his ridiculous degraded king'. Having recognised the world as irrational and absurd, The Fool will say,

When usurers tell their gold I'the'field,
And bawds and whores the churches build
Then shall the realm of Albion
Come to great confusion
Then comes the time, who lives to see't
That going shall be us'd with feet.

Conclusion

Both Bakhtin's idea of the carnival with its freedom from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) and Kolakowski's idea of the Jester with its exposition of contradictions in power structures in a society are seemingly subversive in their application. The differences between the two are clear enough. While Bakhtin's carnival participant is in a close and internal, 'concretely sensual' contact with others, Kott's Jester 'observes from the sidelines'. However, both share the liberating 'serio ludere', which aims at destabilising any fixed values and ridiculing the official establishment. Both are forms of philosophy which expose as doubtful hierarchical values, revealing contradictions and reading sense into the absurd. Kott's understanding the grotesque seems to echo Kolakowski's and Bahktin's need for destabilisation and rejection of any absolutes. Despite the fact that the convergence Kott and Bakhtin can only be seen on its implicit level in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, it is explicitly manifested in Kott's later work , particularly in the 70s and 80s. Kott like Bakhtin is convinced that in carnival wisdom can be found the essence of life and its continuity.

Endnotes

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[2] Alan Sinfield, 'The Theatre and its audiences', *The Context of English Literature: Society and Literature 1945-1970* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 183.

[3] Alan Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare: the Theatre and The Making of Ideology', *Political Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 164.

[4] Sinfield, *ibid.*, p.166.

[5] Czeslaw Milosz, *History of Polish Literature* (Berkley: University of California, 1983).

[6] Milosz, *History of Polish Literature*, p.517.

[7] Ronald Knowles, *Shakespeare and Carnival after Bakhtin* (London: Macmillian Press, 1998).

[8] Mikhail Bakhtin, Voprosy literatury I estetiki, pp. 225-26, (hhtp: www.utm.edu/research/iep/b/bakhtin.htm accessed on 11/12/2001).

[9] Jan Kott, 'The Bottom Translation', *The Bottom Translation: Marlowe and Shakespeare: Carnivalesqe Tradition* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1987), pp. 31-32. The book will be further referred to as *The Bottom.*

[10] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Caryl Emerson, ed., (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp.129-30.

[11] The Bakhtin Circle, 'Carnival, History and Popular Culture: Rabelais, Goethe and Dostoevskii as Philosophers', hhtp:/www.utm.edu/research/iep/b/bakhtin.htm accessed on 11/12/01, p.12.

[12] Kott, *The Bottom,* pp. *32-33.*

[13] Kott, *The Bottom*, p. 32.

[14] Kott, The *Bottom*, p. 39.

[15] Kott, *The Bottom,* p. 43.

[16] Kott, *The Bottom,* p. 44.

[17] Kott, *The Bottom* , p. 44.

[18] Kott, *The Bottom,* p. 58

[19] Kott, *SOC*, p.132.

[20] Kott, *SOC, p.132.*

[21] Kott, *SOC*, p. 133.

[22] Kott, *SOC*, p. 148.

[23] Knowles, *Shakespeare and the Carnival*, p. 5.

[24] Kott, *SOC*, p. 140.

[25] Kott, *SOC*, p.153.

[26] Kott, *SOC, p.* 155.

[27] Kott, *SOC, p.* 155.

[28] Kott, *SOC,* p. 149.

[29] John Barrow, *The World Within the World* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p 137.

[30] Kott, *SOC,* p. 151.

[31] Kott, *SOC,* p. 141.

[32] Kott, *SOC* , p. 141.

[33] Leszek Kolakowski, 'The Priest and The Jester', *Toward a Marxist Humanism: Essays on the Left Today*, (New York, 1969), pp. 33-34.

[34] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* p. 123

[35] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.96.

[36] Bakhtin, *ibid.*, p.48.

[37] Kott, *SOC,* p. 163.

[38] Desiderius Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p 99.

[39] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), pp. 30-31.

[40] Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation,* p. 31.

[41] Kott, *SOC,* p. 167.

[42] Kott, *SOC,* p. 153.

[43] Kott, *SOC,* p.162.

[44] Kott, *SOC,* p. 216.

[45] Kott, *SOC,* p. 164.

[46] Kott, *SOC,* p. 164.

[47] Kott, *SOC,* p. 164.

[48] Kott, *SOC,* p. 167.

[49] David Wiles, 'Carnivalesque in Midsummer Night's Dream', *Shakespeare and Carnival after Bakhtin* ed. Ronald Knowles (London: McMillian Press, 1998), pp 61-82.

[50] Wiles, 'Carnivalesque in Midsummer Night's Dream', p. 75.

[51] Kolakowski,, 'The Priest and The Jester', pp. 33-34.

[52] Kott, *SOC,* p. 166.

Conclusion

In its British context, Dollimore's and Sinfield's account of Kott and Tillyard seems correct. What is consistent in both Kott and Tillyard's interpretations is their understanding of tragedy in terms of some ritual experience. They see the experience as a means of coming to terms with human identity with in a larger teleological order (Tillyard) or existence of uncontrollable forces (Kott). They are convinced of the existence of some 'centres', uncontrollable forces like the Grand Mechanism or God's providence, forces that determine the social and moral order. Kott and Tillyard offer two apparently different versions, yet those versions can be seen as complementary. Kott echoes Steiner in his insistence on a tragedy that is 'that form of art which requires the intolerable burden of God's presence'.[1] Similarly Tillyard believes in the existence of a 'sacrificial purgation' which requires recognition of a God, a victim, a killer, and an audience. The audience/reader should be able to 'link' himself or herself with the victim, in this case Hamlet, to enjoy the 'catharsis' and 'the sheer pleasure'. But Tillyard, unlike Kott, does not see plays like *Hamlet* as being dominated by social and political themes ('No one gives a thought to Denmark as ruled by Fortinbras').

Similarly Kott's and Tillyard's responses to the concept of tragedy involve some kind of a violation of order, either in psychological terms (Tillyard) or in a more objective public and political sense (Kott). This idea is, as Dollimore and Sinfield claim, essentially conservative. Tillyard's cautionary interpretation of Shakespeare reflects his vision of *The Elizabethan World Picture*. Shakespeare's

characters belong to a social and moral order which is determined by God's Providence.

Kott, on the other hand, comes closer to an Aristotelian concept of tragedy where the role of the tragic protagonist and the affective power of the tragic experience itself are focused around the challenge to authority whose power is made manifest throughout the conflict. Kott's reading of *King Lear* as an essentially political drama with the hero as rebel may be seen as an example of this Aristotelian pattern. Further Kott seems to share Aristotle's belief that a tragedy 'imitates those actions of man which have the good as their goal', and that 'the highest good is the political one and the political one is justice'.[2]

What can be seen as Kott's and Tillyard's coherent interpretation of tragic fate is their conviction about some imposed scenario or God's will that dictates the actions of the dramatis personae but does not explain motives underlying the actions. In other words, both versions offer a Shakespeare who manifests the same principle – the inevitability of human fate. Kott's vision echoes that of Lukacs who believes that 'a tragedy fulfils a revelatory function where the object is the essence of man', and that 'tragedy begins at the moment when enigmatic forces have distilled the essence from a man, have forced [him] to become essential; and the progress of tragedy consists in his essential true nature becoming more and more manifest'.[3]

Tillyard shares Hegel's interest in the brilliance that a universal human nature in a particular form or tragedy excites the horror, sympathy, and admiration it does as it is composed largely of qualities on which we set up high value. [4] Tillyard's

preoccupation with some aesthetic values requires recognition of drama as a social experience, a condition that cannot be 'from that of the audience, or in a larger yet strict sense from that of the social and political community'.[5]

Dollimore and Sinfield's primary concern is that Kott's and Tillyard's understanding of tragedy is shaped by some universal or naturally given approach, a phenomenon that can be described as an 'index of the covertly political management of human feeling rooted in ideology'. Both Kott and Tillyard can be seen as 'products' of these ideological 'forces' and they both belong, as Dollimore and Sinfield argue, to the tradition of Western philosophies. Augusto Boal seems to share a similar conviction about the mechanism of repression and political control in Western cultural heritage. Boal's argument can support Dollimore and Sinfield's supposition as he argues that Aristotelian 'catharsis' (similarly to Tillyard's 'sacrificial purgation' or Kott's Grand Mechanism) is a form of 'political control', where 'the tragic hero appears when the State begins to utilise the theatre for political purposes'.[6] In its constant return to a position of 'psychological' or 'political' equilibrium, a tragedy like *Hamlet* can be said to reinforce artistically the desirability of order. As Dollimore and Sinfield understand, Kott and Tillyard present the desirability of order, showing some kind of metaphysical order or some 'centre', the essence of man, tragic suffering common to human nature.

Having said this, however, Dollimore and Sinfield seem to underestimate Kott's impact on Shakespeare stage and criticism in its Polish context. There are some major discrepancies in Kott and Tillyard's readings of Shakespeare, which should be understood in the context of the different political, cultural and social realities to which Kott and Tillyard belonged. Kott can be perceived as traditional in his vision of universal values. However, Kott's involvement with existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd , dramatised in his treatment of *King Lear,* can be also seen as a form of resistance to the then dominant cultural policies in Poland. Dollimore and Sinfield seem to apply their understanding of the origin of the Theatre of the Absurd in the West, to the Eastern tradition. While they recognise the nihilistic nature and lack of political and social role in Western interpretations of absurdism, they neglect the fact that Theatre of the Absurd in its Eastern scenarios was essentially political and oppositional.

Kott's use of oppositional poetics was significantly influenced by Kolakowski's philosophy of Jester/Priest. Kott formulated his idea of the absurd through this metaphor. In his treatment of The Fool, Kott offers an alternative to the traditional Erasmian concept. Kott's placing of the Fool at the centre stage and reading *King Lear* from the perspective of Kolakowski's Priest/Jester metaphor can be viewed as oppositional and political, not suggesting a nihilistic vision, but on the contrary a constructive analysis of contemporary culture. Kolakowski's metaphor was an expression of the attitude of Kott towards his place in the social frame, his relation towards the Catholic Church (the Priest) and communism (the Jester). It is important then to see Kott and his poetics in their ideological context, which Dollimore and Sinfield undervalue.

In addition, Dollimore and Sinfield limit the impact of Kott to his *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* phase, neglecting his work before and after and thus failing to acknowledge Kott's work in terms of process. It seems important to view Kott and his work through shifting intellectual and critical stages from his involvement with socialist realism, existentialism and to the Theatre of the Absurd, as well as through his shifting political standpoints from Marxism to post-Marxism. In the context of politics and literature, it can be argued that *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* describes only one of Kott's distinctive critical and philosophical stages.

Re-reading Kott's Shakespeare through later work like *The Bottom Translation* can be illuminating and help re- evaluate his Shakespeare. As I have sought to demonstrate in my re-reading of Kott's *King Lear*, despite their significant theoretical divergences, there are, however, important some theoretical continuities between the critical and oppositional thought of Kott, Kolakowski and Bakhtin. Kott's concept of the Grand Mechanism, his idea of the absurd, Kolakowski's metaphor of The Priest and Jester and Bakhtin's notion of the carnival can be seen as attempting to destabilise fixed hierarchical values and absolutes, revealing contradictions in the power structures in a society.

Endnotes

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[4] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p.88, 1n.
[5] Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's History Plays: Mirror of Elizabethan Policy* (1936, London: Methuen, 1964), p.113.

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Appendix A

Shakespeare criticism in *DIALOG* in chronological order: 1956-1994

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- Thomas Stearns Eliot, ' Poezja i dramat'. 1957-10/95-104

1958

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- Stanislaw Helsztynski, 'Tydzien w Stratfordzie'. 1958 -1/133-141.
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1960

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- Jan Kott , 'Król Lear czyli Koncówka'. 1960-8/70-80.
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1961

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- Edith Olivier, 'Hamlet w/g sw Jana Kotta'. 1968-4/146-148.
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- Krystyna Griffith-Jones, 'Jak sie wam podoba z dziwczetami i bez'.
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- 'Brook o Szekspirze'. 1975-2/172-173.
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- 'Korespondencja'. 1992-1-2/237-238.
- 'Korespondencja'. 1992-5/134-135.
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- 'Plec Kotta i Shakespeare'a'. 1993-10/131-134.

1994

- 'Proba rehabilitacji, czyli Ryszard III' . 1994-1/157-159.
- ''Shakespeare wspólczesny Iana Judge'a'. 1994-10/152-158.
- Peter Brook, 'Dla Jana Kotta'. 1994-12/159 .

Appendix B

JAN KOTT: Annotated BIBLIOGRAPHY
derived from *Shakespeare Quarterly* in chronological order: 1983-1993

1983 (items 755, 1083, 1251, 1392, 1640, 1642, 2067, 2703, 2732)

- 'Jan Kott Analyse von Macbeth: Drama und krtischer Text' Ahrens, Shakespeare: Didaktisches Handbuch [F], III, pp. 885-909 [uses Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* to illustrate the use of criticism in teaching Shakespeare].
- Marrapodi, Michele 'Shakespeare, la storia e il tema imperiale' Incontri Meridionali: *Rivista di Storia e Cultura*, Terza nSer, Nos. 1-2 (1983), pp. 21-50 [re-examines the idea of history and the 'imperial theme' in Shakespeare in the light of *S.O.C*].
- Brinker, Menahem, and René Litvin, eds., 'Hamlet ve-Shakespeare' [Hamlet and Shakespeare]: Jerusalem; *Keter* 1983, 224 pp (tr. Into Hebrew by Tamar Amit].

1984 (926, 942, 1409, 1824, 2769, 3454)

- Kott, J., 'Theatre- the Eternal Art. of the Particular Moment' *New York Times* , 2 Sept. 1984, sec. 2, pp. 1, 5.[excerpt from Kott's forthcoming *The Theatre of Essence* including comments on productions of *Macbeth* in Moscow, *Hamlet* in Krakow, the illusions of reality and the reality of illusions in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, masks].
- Marrapodi, Michele 'The Great Image: Figure e immagini della regalita nel teatro di Shakespeare' Rome: *Heredr Editore*, 1984, 146 pp.[Shakespeare's 'great image of authority' despite Kott's notorious interpretation , adheres to the political doctrine of the time, follows the Tudor conception of monarchy, and claims for order, continuity, and harmony in the body politic].
- Zern, Leif, 'Alskaren och mordaren: Shakespeare och den andra spelplatsen' [The Lover and the Murderer: Shakespeare and other Stageplace) Stockholm: *ALBA* ,

1984, 202 pp.[argues against Kott's interpretation of *Macbeth* as a tale about the birth of fascism. Sees violence as a dramatic convention and believes the real drama is existential].

- Prince, Anthony, ed. Shakespeare's a *Midsummer Night's Dream*: a *Casebook.* London: Macmillan, 1983, 208pp [includes analyses by Kott].

1985 (444, 970, 1122, 1149, 2131, 24011, 2861, 2862, 2863, 3600, 3654)

- Kott, Jan, 'Das Ende des umoglichen Theateres' *Theater Heute* (Jahrbuch), 13(1980), pp. 138-43 (tr. by Peter Lachmann) [sketches the 'impossible theatre which is understood as an attempt to replace theatre with its own imaginary doubles such as revolution, , counter-culture, lost paradise, ritual, metaphysical trance, and relates them to Artaud's ''theatre of Cruelty''. Examples include references to Strehler's production of *Tempest* in Milan].
- Kott Jan's *The Theatre of Essence*, Introduction by Martin Esslin, Evanston, Ill, Northwestern, UP, 1984, 218pp.
- 'List Lukacsa do Jana Kotta w sprawie Szekspira' (Lukacs' Letter to Kott About Shakespeare) *Tworczosc*: Warszawa 6 (1985) [praises and finds Kott's failure to take into consideration the historical context of Elizabethan theatre and the times of Shakespeare].
- Kott, Jan, 'Das Dunkle im neven lichte: Der versetzte zettel 9, *Theater heute*, 22, ix(1981) 46-49; *Theater heute*, 22, viii (1981), pp. 32-41.
- Kott, Jan, 'der versetzte Zettel oder die esel-liebe einer Konigin als historishe Theaterpremiere', *Theater heute*, 22 viii (1981) 32-41 (tr. by Peter Lachmann) [traces the motifs and myths in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and exemplifies the complex interweaving of myth, biblical sources and erotic motifs in the play (e.g. the linking of Corinthians and the carnivalesque tradition in Bottom's metamorphosis). Explains the convention of the masque, esp. in regard to production of the play].

- Kott, Jan, 'Burza albo powtorzenie' (The Tempest or the Repetition) *Tworczosc*: Warszawa 7-8(1985), pp. 183-210 [sees the play in the context of connotations

between the mythical tradition and the new experience of New World discoverers and colonisers, with a special focus on Caliban as the man of the New World].

1986 (990, 1055, 1282, 1718, 2582, 2585)

- Elsom, John, 'Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?' *Contemporary Review* 249(1986), pp. 315-19.
- Kott, Jan '*Ran* oder ende der Welt' *Theater heute*, 27 , v, (1986) 16-21 (tr. by Frank Heibert) [discusses the importance of the historical frame of Kurosawas's film adaptation of *King Lear*, and the effects of transporting Shakespeare's play onto a different state of a classical Japanese theatre].

1987 (1079, 1209, 1258, 1321, 1475, 2365, 3411, 3426, 3428)

- Becker, Peter von 'Shakespeare und Herr Kott personlich: eine hommage in London - gedenkblatt aus dem alten Jahr' *Theater heute*, 28 (1987) [recollection of conversation with Kott at an international meeting of Shakespeare scholars, critics, actors, directors in London, Fall 1986).
- Kott, Jan, *The Bottom Translation: Marlowe and Shakespeare and the Carnival Tradition* (tr. Daniela Miedzyrzecka and Lillian Vallee), Northwestern UP 1987
- Padilla, Heberto 'Dos hombres y un aniverario' *El nuevo dia*/ Domingo, 1 Nov (1987), p. 2.
  [contends that, despite Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Cervantes' *Quijote* being the world's greatest literary works, there is a need to make Cervantes 'our contemporary', just as Kott did with Shakespeare].
- Vidal, Juan Carlos, 'Paseando por El Prado con Jan Kott' *Quimera*, 64 (1987), 26-33 [during a visit to Madrid, Kott took part in a serious of meetings on Shakespeare with a paper on 'Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary'. Kott's answer being negative applied to the 80s].

1988 (1203, 1204, 1387, 1829, 1830, 1845, 2942, 3030, 3064, 3669)

- Marowitz, Charles, 'Kott, Our Contemporary' *American Theatre*, vii (1988) 16-18, pp. 100-102 [in this interview, Kott comments on such matters a the relevance

of Shakespeare's plays in modern life, their universality, the problems of historicizing productions of them, and Brecht's dialectical approach to context].

- Cancino, Claudia 'Lear y Godot; puntos de contacto' Mexico, *UNAM,* (1988), 50pp [first degree thesis, compares *Lear* to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*].
- Lieblein, Leanore 'Jan Kott, Peter Brook, and King Lear' *JDTC* (Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism) 1, ii Spring (1987), pp. 39-49 [argues that Brook was not simply influenced by Kott, but their view converged as in seen in Brook's production of *King Lear* in the Royal Shakespeare Company (1962)].
- Joyce, Elisabeth 'From Prine to Punk: Students' reception and the English Hamlet of the Mid Century' [student's reception of *Hamlet* tends to be of two opposite kinds: on page the play 'dauntingly obscure", on stage- 'clear and exiting, the pedagogical problem is to solve the two responses. Considers several productions of Hamlet in England staged after Kott's 'Hamlet of the Midcentury' (1965) including Hall's (1965), Page's 9 (1970), Chatwyn's (1971), Goodbody's (1975), Eyre's, Barton's (1980) and the BBC-TV Hamlet to depict the range of different views].
- Bloom, Harold, ed. William Shakespeare's *A MidSummer Night's Dream* (modern interpretation).
- Kott, Jan, 'Spodek przetlumaczony' *Dialog* 5 (1987), pp.104-19. [Using Bakhtin's theory of literature, analyses *MND* and places the play within the spheres of theatricality and neoplatonism].

1989

- Kott, Jan, 'Two Paradoxes of Othello' *Sovremennaya dramatugiya* (Moscow) 6 (1989), pp. 234-43.

1990 (603, 1089, 1200, 1201, 1202, 1203, 1204, 1393, 1447, 1696,1831, 3670, 3917)

- Kubikowski, Tomasz, 'Trudno zbudowac dramat' (Is Difficult To Set up a Drama) *Teatr* Warszawa 11 (1990) [Although Shakespeare plays are never off the Polish stage, there is a little of the poet in the performances. The directors do not follow the text but focus on certain stereotypes such as the Great Mechanism of the

power, of lust, (with most stereotypes inspired by Kott) too many ornaments are used while actors' words and gestures are disregarded].

- Catrinescu, Eva ,'Enigma Shakespeare' (The Enigma of Shakespeare) *Theatrnl* 10(1989), pp. 69-75 [Surveys opinions of Borges, Kott, Brook, Strehler, Strinberg, Brecht on the enigma of Shakespeare].
- Kott, Jan , *Shakespeare Carnival* (tr. from Japan by Hiroshi Takayama) Tokyo: Heibonsh, 1989, 253 pp.
- Kott, Jan, *Szekspir wspolczesny, Krakow,* wyd.Lit, 1990, 444 pp.
- Kott, Jan, *The Botttom Translation Marlowe & Shakespeare and the Carnival Tradition.*
- Kott, Jan T*heatre of Essence,* 1984.
- Kott, Jan, 'The Dramaturgy' *NTQ,* 6, XXI (1990).
- Ciglar-Zanic, Janja, 'The Appropriation and Recent Uses of the Shakespeare canon, Jan Kott and the Traditional Shakespeare criticism' *Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagrabiensia*, 35 (1990), pp.39-47.
- Lichtenstein, Leone, 'Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary' *ShSo A* , 3 (1989), pp 78-86.
- Houliston, Victor, 'Shakespeare Is Not Our Contemporary: Classical Rhetoric and the Teaching of Shakespeare' *ShSoA*, 3 (1989), pp. 67-77.
- Kott, Jan, 'Bottom' Warszawa: *Teatr* 11 (1990), p. 2.

1991 (1162, 1163, 1164, 1165, 1186, 1316, 1362, 1404, 2076, 2349, 3450, 3451)

- Kott, Jan 'Wciaz wspolczesny ' Warszawa: Dialog 9 (1991).
- Markowitz Charles, *Recycling Shakespeare* New York: Applause, 1991, 178pp.
- Ciglar-Zanic, Janja, 'Jan Kott and the Shakespearn Order of Discourse' [in] *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference*, Krakow, 1990-April, Gibinska, Mazur, ed, Krakow: Universitas, 1992.

1993 (784, 1078, 2071, 2072, 2490, 2589, 3074, 3858, 5048)

- Dion Gregg 'Fortinbras, our contemporary' *Theatre* 38 (1993), pp. 17-27 [Observes that in productions of *Hamlet* that reflect political circumstances

Fortibras in particular has become a principal signifier in political interpretations. Discusses several appropriations of the play with particular attention to Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*].

- Graczyk Ewa, 'Hiob, Lear i Koncowka' (Job, Lear and the Endgame) in *Od Shakespeare's do Szekspira* Gdansk: Centrum Edukacji Teatralnej, 1993 [responds to Kott's interpretations].
- Kott Jan, 'Bottom and the Boys' *NTQ 9* (1993), pp. 307-15 [Considers the issue of 'translation' in relation to the practicalities of the Elizabethan theatre, and the likelihood that the mechanical, doubling as the fairies, were played by boys brought in for the wedding celebrations at which the play must have been first performed].
- Sugiera Malgorzata, 'Hamlet wspolczesny' in *Od Shakespeare's do Szekspira* [responds to Kott's interpretation of *Hamlet* in the light of Tom Stoppard's *Rozencrantz and Gilderstern Are Dead*, Janusz Glowacki's *Fortybras sie upil*, and Jerzy Zurek's *Po Hamlecie*].
- Kleber, Pia, 'Theatrical Continuities in Georgio Strehler's *The Tempest'*. [Focuses on the Brechtian aspect of Strehler's *Tempest* (1978) especially as these are reflected in response by Kott and Planchon to the production].